

NEKATERI VIDIKI TERORIZMA IN BOJA PROTI TERORIZMU V RUSKI FEDERACIJI

CERTAIN ASPECTS OF TERRORISM AND FIGHTING TERRORISM IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Professional article

Povzetek Terorizem v Rusiji nikakor ni nov pojav. Ogrožal je že carsko Rusijo, v času Sovjetske zveze, posebno Stalinove vladavine pa je obstajal državni terorizem v obliki tako imenovanega rdečega terorja. Po razpadu Sovjetske zveze je v 90. letih prejšnjega stoletja v Rusiji prišlo do islamskega, predvsem čečenskega terorizma. Avtor ta terorizem imenuje »divjaški«, saj je povzročil ogromno žrtev med nedolžnimi otroki (Beslan), napada pa tudi bolnišnice, kulturne prireditve ipd. Ruski državi dolgo ni uspelo najti pravih odgovorov na sodobni terorizem. Akcije njenih varnostnih organov so bile pogosto kaotične in so povzročile veliko žrtev med talci. Avtor zagovarja tezo, da je med regijama nekdanjih Sovjetske zveze in Jugoslavije veliko podobnosti in bi v Jugovzhodni Evropi morali ruske izkušnje podrobno analizirati, da bi se vnaprej ustrezno pripravili na morebitne pojave islamskega in drugega terorizma.

Ključne besede *Terorizem, protiterorizem, obveščevalna služba, varnostna služba, talci, islam.*

Abstract Terrorism is by no means a new phenomenon in the Russian Federation. It was present in the Tsarist era and in the Soviet Union, and the period of Stalin's rule was marked by the so-called "red terror" state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Islamic terrorism occurred in the Russian Federation, especially among the Chechen population. The author calls this form of terrorism "savage" in light of the killing of innocent children (in Beslan) and the selection of targets (hospitals, cultural events etc.) these terrorists adhere to. The Russian government has long struggled to respond efficiently to modern terrorist threats. Its security service has often taken chaotic measures, leading to numerous deaths among hostages. The author's intention is to highlight the similarities between the former USSR region and former Yugoslavia and show that South-Eastern Europe could learn a lot from Russian experiences and prepare for the potential occurrence of Islamic and other terrorist movements in the region based on that knowledge.

Key words *Terrorism, anti-terrorism, intelligence service, security service, hostages, Islam.*

Introduction Terrorism is not a new phenomenon and it is not likely to be eradicated in the near future. It has affected all corners of the globe, though arguably some regions feel its consequences more than others. It is by no means a “third-world phenomenon”; even countries at the forefront of democracy, such as Sweden (e.g. the murder of Olaf Palmer, the assassination of the Yugoslavian Ambassador Mr Rolović, hijacking of aircrafts etc.) must deal with it, as well as several Western European countries (“right-wing” or “black” terrorism, “left-wing” terrorism), former Yugoslavia (mostly affected by nationalist terrorism) etc. The only “white spot” after the Second World War was the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, though, admittedly, these regions were familiar with the threat of state terrorism and the so-called “red terror”. Today, the situation is very different. While terrorism is in decline in Western Europe,¹ the Russian Federation must now deal with it daily. This article aims to address terrorism in the Russian Federation and partly analyze the Russian approach to fighting terrorism.

Former USSR and Russia share several similarities with former Yugoslavia:

- both were multinational federations, and the collapse of both has led to the establishment of a number of sovereign states;
- all these new countries have witnessed significant political changes (socialism → capitalism, often accompanied by “wild” privatization; one-party system → multi-party parliamentarianism etc.);
- the collapse of both led to extensive violence and even wars. Weapons and military equipment became widely accessible, trained and experienced ex-warriors resorted to violence to express their disappointment;
- both regions still have several nationalist issues to resolve;
- both face the threat of Islamic terrorism. Terrorism, particularly Islamic terrorism, is a major problem in the Russian Federation and some other former USSR-countries, whereas our region faces the latent possibility of a re-occurrence of such terrorist movements (Bosnia and Herzegovina², the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo³, parts of Serbia, Greece etc.);

¹ *This does not mean, of course, that these countries are immune to terrorist threats in case of an economic crisis, social moral crisis etc. fuelling public discontent.*

² *Some estimates show that nearly every Islamic terrorist action in the United States and Western Europe included at least one Bosnian citizen. In January 2010, for example, a Bosniac Adis Medunjanin was arrested in the US for plotting a terrorist attack in New York; in June 2009, Anes Subasic was arrested in the US for planning a violent jihad, and Asim Cejvanovic from Brčko was arrested in Vienna in 2007 – he was trying to enter the US Embassy with a backpack filled with grenades and nails. Terrorists are just as likely to hit Bosnia and Herzegovina or the wider Balkans region, choosing Serbs, Croats, international organisations and the like as their targets.*

³ *An Albanian from Kosovo, Hysen Sharifi, was arrested in the US while preparing a terrorist attack, and Albanians from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) – Driton Duka, Eljvir Duka, Shain Duka – were stopped by the FBI as they were preparing to hit Fort Dix Army base in New Jersey. Earlier, Sead Jakup, who came to the US from Bosnia and Herzegovina, tried to burn down a synagogue in Brooklyn, New York. Numerous Albanian terrorist organisations are known to have operated in Kosovo and FYROM (e.g. ANA), and the author believes they could very possibly resume their activities in the region.*

- criminality is a major problem in both regions, where criminal organizations are sometimes linked to certain political elites.

The Russian example is instructive in terms of Islamic terrorists' objectives and methods, but it also allows us to draw lessons on the Russian approach to fighting terrorism within various segments of the security system. It reveals many flaws that can and should be avoided in South Eastern Europe. There is no point in waiting for terrorists to strike.

1 THE HISTORY OF TERRORISM IN RUSSIA

Terrorism is by no means a new phenomenon in Russia. It goes back to the Tsarist regime when it mostly included social movements fighting for change. In this sense, Decabrists may be considered as a terrorist organization in a way, as well as the Nihilist movement, the Anarchists, and a movement called *Narodnaya volya* (The People's Will) etc. After several attempts, the partisans of the latter even succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II in March 1881. Terrorists were largely inspired by anarchy theories by Bakunin and Nechayev⁴. In his *National Catechism*, Bakunin defended the use of "selective, discriminatory terrorism", while Nechayev argued in the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*: "Day and night, his sole aim must be: merciless destruction." (Combs, 1997, pp. 28) What is of interest here is the decision of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party to establish an illegal "Combat Organization" to carry out terrorist operations⁵ without compromising the political goals of the Party itself. This "revolutionary terrorism" strived to destroy or fundamentally alter the state structure. Although their theoretical writings emphasized that a terrorist must have mercy on no one, they only targeted government officials in practice. The government took strict repressive measures, which paradoxically only led to an increase in revolutionary activities. While state authorities, particularly "Ohrana", the tsarist secret police, were at the forefront of the fight against terrorism, an "Alliance of Russian Men" also undertook to fight them "with all available means" (including illegal, such as assassinations, bombings)⁶. Then with Bolshevism came "red terror", pursuing the opposite aim, i.e. to affirm the Bolshevik rule and political apparatus. This is characteristic of "state terrorism" (Picture 1), aiming to intimidate the civilian population and exterminate "enemies of the people". The movement was particularly strong during the rule of J. V. Stalin, and especially between 1936 and 1938. Stalin first dealt with all existing and potential opposition within the Communist Party⁷ and the state apparatus, only to incite widespread paranoia and repression among the civilian population. In line with this, Stalin stated the following at the plenary

⁴ *Their impact could also be noted among terrorist organizations of past and present days in Western Europe, for example ETA, the IRA, the Red Brigades etc.*

⁵ *This method was later also used by some terrorist organizations in Western Europe, e.g. the IRA.*

⁶ *Later, the so-called Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL) in Spain used the same methods to fight ETA.*

⁷ *After Lenin died, Stalin was the only one of the seven AUCP(b) Politburo members to survive; Grigory Zinovyev and Lev Kamenev were executed, Mikhail Tomsky committed suicide, and Alexei Rikov and Nikolai Bukharin were shot in 1938. The last remaining member of the Politburo Leon Trotsky was killed by Stalin's secret police agent in Mexico in 1940.*

session of the Central Committee of AUCP(b) in February-March 1937: "Is it not clear that for as long as we have capitalist encirclement, we shall have wreckers, spies, diversionists, and killers sent to our rear by agents of foreign states?" (Linder, Ćurkin, 2006:553). This period in history is known as the era of "pogroms", "the great purge", "the great terror" etc. Some estimate that as many as 20 million people were killed in the Soviet Union in that period⁸, equal to the number of lives lost on the part of Soviet Union during the Second World War. Stalin tried to justify this approach by saying the country must pursue economic and other development: "We are 50 to 100 years behind advanced countries, and we must cover this distance in ten years. Otherwise, we will be crushed." (Pettiford and Harding, 2005:181). After Stalin's death and the process of De-Stalinization initiated by Nikita Khrushchev, state terrorism was in decline, although it never really vanished until the arrival of Gorbachev and the collapse of the Soviet Union⁹.

Immediately after the Second World War, the Soviet Union also saw the rise of anti-state terrorism (ex-collaborationist groups, the "vlasov army", the organization of Ukrainian nationalists under Bandera etc., who called for reforms of the social structure and/or national independence), which was also present during the Cold War, at least to a limited degree. A certain level of paranoia against imperialist spies, sabotage and terrorism was incited throughout that period. The Soviet secret service – the KGB – thus defined a terrorist act as "one of the most extreme acts of subversion, carried out by capitalist intelligence services, their agents and anti-Soviet elements within the state, including assassinations of government officials and state representatives, inflicting severe physical injury to such individuals and damage to their government offices with the aim of undermining or weakening Soviet authority. Terrorism is a criminal act against the state in its most severe form. Rather than threatening the security of individuals, a terrorist strives to weaken the Soviet regime." (Mitrokhin, 2002:393-394). On the other hand, many Western authors (e.g. Claire Sterling) accused the Soviet Union of supporting terrorist organizations and individuals acting against Western countries or their interests¹⁰.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was a sort of "white spot" compared to Western Europe and some other parts of the world, tainted by severe terrorist attacks. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation and some other territories of the former Soviet Union saw a rapid expansion of terrorism. Some of the reasons for this trend may be:

- weakened control structures or even a collapse thereof in Russia and other former USSR countries;

⁸ *Stalin was then allegedly quoted as saying: "The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic."*

⁹ *There was a joke reflecting the state of affairs in the Soviet Union in that era: A new prisoner arrives in prison, and other prisoners ask what his punishment is. "Fifteen years," he answers. "So what did you do?" "Nothing!" the newcomer responds. "Oh come on, stop lying! You'd only get ten years for nothing."*

¹⁰ *Authors often point out, however, that the Soviet Union was much more discrete in supporting terrorists than, for example, Syria, Libya etc.*

- strengthened nationalist tendencies and demands for independence among some non-Russian peoples within the Russian Federation (Chechnya etc.);
- external forces (extreme Islam, fights over energy sources and transport routes for oil and natural gas, etc.).

2 TERRORIST ACTS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AFTER 1993

According to some statistics, the number of terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation during 1993-2007 is well above 150 and up to even several hundred (Terrorizm v Rossii). Between 4 September 1999 and 1 September 2004 alone (hence without including the Beslan victims), at least 1005 people were killed in terrorist attacks (excluding deaths among terrorists themselves; Palter-Zyberk, 2004). Most terrorist activities during that period took place in the Caucasian region, especially in Chechnya and Dagestan, although at least 15 attacks were carried out in Moscow. Terrorists were mostly members of groups fighting for independence from the Russian Federation, namely Chechen groups, and most of these groups had ties with extreme Islamic movements. Oddly enough, some members of extreme Russian nationalist groups were also involved in some of the terrorist attacks. Terrorists targeted public transport, including aircrafts (at least three hijackings and destructions), helicopters (at least one), buses and bus stations (at least seven attacks), metro stations (at least six instances), trains and train stations (at least seven attacks), apartment buildings (at least seven attacks), as well as hospitals (at least three attacks), cultural facilities (at least two attacks), pop concerts¹¹ (where the majority of victims are inevitably young!) and even schools on at least two separate occasions – one of which was the notorious attack in Beslan. The fact that they target schools (children!), cultural institutions and hospitals shows just how ruthless these terrorists are and how strong their hatred is against the Russian people as well as the Russian government. At the same time, it proves just how savage they are in their nature. It reminds us again that there is no excuse for terrorism. Its means may differ (explosives, hijacking, taking hostages etc.), but the end is always the same: to kill as many people as possible. Terrorists seldom target military or police facilities, FSB centers etc., but prefer places where large numbers of civilians gather (e.g. railway, bus and metro stations, schools, hospitals, markets etc.) in order to cause more damage. It is also important to note that at least three attempts or attacks were carried out on 9 May (Victory Day), probably as an expression of adherence to Nazism¹². Terrorists are very often willing to sacrifice their own lives as well – a known phenomenon are the so-called “black widows” or “brides of Allah”, as journalist Julija Juzik called the Chechen women who had lost their spouses or brothers in combat against Russian forces.

¹¹ On 6 June 2003, the “black widows” killed 16 people with explosives at a rock concert at Tushino airport outside Moscow.

¹² On 8 May 2007, a VAZ-2107 car was discovered in Moscow, packed with explosives; on 9 May 2004, an explosion occurred at Grozny’s Dynamo stadium; and on 9 May 2002, 42 people were killed and over a 100 injured in a blast in Kaspisk, Dagestan.

In addition, several critics of the current situation in the Russian Federation were assassinated, for example journalist Anna Politkovskaya and former FSB officer Alexander Litvinenko. There are many in the Russian Federation and especially abroad who actually believe these individuals were killed by the government which is trying to silence all opponents. The authorities strongly oppose any such insinuations. If these allegations are true, however, then Russia is actually dealing with state terrorism, the intention of which is not only to eliminate particular individuals, but also to discourage all others from expressing criticism¹³.

2.1 Case studies

2.1.1 Bombardment of apartment buildings

Several bombs were set off in apartment buildings in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgograd during September 1999, killing about 300 people. These attacks caused quite a shock. People organized night watches in front of their apartment buildings in Moscow and other cities. These bombings also led to (or were used as an excuse for) the second Chechen War¹⁴. Nobody in Chechnya ever took responsibility for the attacks, and some in Russia and abroad claimed that FSB staged the Russian apartment bombings and then blamed it on the Chechens to justify a new invasion¹⁵. One of the most fervent advocates of this conspiracy theory, the former FSB agent Litvinenko, was later poisoned with radionuclide polonium-210 in London. A member of the State Duma Sergei Kovalev started an independent investigation, and two members of the Kovalev investigation commission – also members of the State Duma – were found dead in an apartment. Its legal counsel and investigator, Mikhail Trepashkin was arrested. New suspicions about the apartment bombings were raised after an incident in Rjazan on 23 September 1999 where the police arrested three people who were trying to plant the same explosive (hexogen) in an apartment building as the one terrorists had used in Moscow. The “terrorists” turned out to be FSB agents, and the Director of the FSB Patrushev said it was a rehearsal (Litvinenko and Felshtinsky, 2007:79–125). On 13 September 1999, Gennady Selyeznov, the speaker of the Duma, interrupted the Duma session and announced he had just received a message that a bomb had exploded in an apartment building in Volgograd. But it wasn't until three days later that the bomb actually went off in Volgograd, killing 19 people (Goldfarb and Litvinenko, 2007:291–292).

Naturally, Russian officials denied these allegations and claimed they had indeed prevented a bombing attack on an apartment building in the Borisovskie prudi Street in Volgograd on 12 September 1999. Boris Yeltsin went even further and stated it

¹³ *Our region also bares some resemblance in this respect: during the Milošević regime, journalist Slavko Ćuruvija was assassinated, as well as Momir Gavrilovic, a high official of the Serbian State Security Service and some others.*

¹⁴ *The Russian Federation refused to grant independence to Chechnya and deployed 40,000 troops to the region instead in 1994. 80,000 people (on both sides) were killed in combat, and Russian forces decided to withdraw in 1996. The second invasion in 1999 led to the deaths of 100,000 people (Martin, 2008:105–106).*

¹⁵ *Similar allegations exist about the US administration plotting the 9/11 attacks to justify its military intervention abroad.*

was “a professional and moral crime to propagate such malicious theories about the causes of the second Chechen War” (Yeltsin, 2000: 293) and claimed that Russian authorities had discovered explosive devices identical to those used in the Apartment bombings during an investigation of Chechen bases. Yeltsin understood the accusation as a conspiracy against the Russian government: “Someone obviously has a strong interest to propagate these lies.” (Yeltsin, 2000:294)

2.2 Crashing of two passenger airliners

On 24 August 2004, two passenger aircraft crashed almost simultaneously after leaving Domodedovo Airport in Moscow. The first, owned by Volga-Avia Ekspres, was headed to Volgograd, whereas the second was an OAO Sibir Airlines airplane flying to Sochi. The second airplane reportedly sent a hijack alarm above Rostov. The first airplane crashed just outside Tula, and all 34 passengers and 9 crew members were killed, whereas the second plane crashed near Glubokoje village in the Rostov region, with all 38 passengers and 8 crew members killed. Eyewitnesses saw the airplanes explode before the crash, and FSB did indeed find traces of hexogen (explosive) in the debris. The radical Islamic group the Islambuli Brigade claimed responsibility for the crashes, but Shamil Basayev challenged this and said he was the one organizing the attacks. He said he had spent 3,300 euro on the operation. The investigators discovered that the attacks were carried out by two “black widows” - Satsita Dzhebirkhanova and Amanta Nagayeva, both from Grozny – who boarded the planes just before takeoff. The terrorists bribed two Domodedovo Airport officials and the officer at the check-in desk, who allowed them to board the airplanes without any ID. Moreover, the police officer who was supposed to inspect all passengers for any weapons or hazardous items did not do this, said the investigators.

2.3 Attacks on passenger trains

A Grozny–Moscow train derailed on 12 June 2005 just outside Uzunovo, 90 kilometers south of Moscow because of explosives on the tracks; before that, on 5 December 2003, another train exploded near the town of Yessentuki between Kislovodsk and Mineralne Vody. The morning Kislovodsk–Mineralne Vody commuter train is also called the “student train”, because many students from Kislovodsk take it to attend classes in Pyatigorsk. The explosion, with the power of 30 kilograms of trinitrotoluene, (TNT) killed 41 people and injured 177. Russian authorities immediately activated the “Uragan-4” plan to find and arrest the terrorists. The investigation revealed that four terrorists were involved in the attack – one male and three “black widows”, and they all died in the attack.

Later, the Moscow—St Petersburg “Nevsky express” derailed on 13 August 2007, and security officials soon discovered the cause: the tracks had been damaged in an explosion of 0.5 kilogram of TNT. Two anarchists from St Petersburg – Andrei Kalenov and Denis Zelenyuk – were arrested at the Malaya Vishera train station soon after the attack. A few days later, the Prague radio station Svoboda (Liberty) received a call from an associate of Said-Emin Dadayev (a Chechen commander). He claimed

that the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs group, established in 2002 by the Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, was responsible for the attack. The local police and FSB agents then carried out a vast investigation in the town of Chudovo in the Novgorod region and arrested a 25-year-old Chechen Hasan Didigov. According to FSB officials, Didigov carried out the attack with the help of Kalenov and Zelenyuk.

Another attack was carried out on the “Nevsky express” train on 27 November 2009 near the town of Bologoye. 30 people were killed and 96 injured. The very next day, the Russian nationalist group Combat 18 claimed responsibility for the attack on the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) blog, followed by Chechen terrorists who said the operation was commanded by Emir Dokka Umarov¹⁶.

3 FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

3.1 Case studies: anti-terrorist actions in the Russian Federation

3.1.1 Budyonnovsk

14. On 14 June 1995, a group of Chechen terrorists, lead by Shamil Basayev, besieged a hospital in the town of Budyonnovsk in Stavropol Krai and took several hundred hostages. Basayev said he would only release the hostages if Russian forces withdrew from Chechnya and free elections were carried out. Agents of two elite Russian special forces units – Vimpel and Alfa – attacked the hospital premises at 5 a.m. on 17 June and only managed to take the ground floor and the first floor, thereby liberating around 70 hostages. Victims were recorded on both sides. As Russian security forces were preparing to proceed to upper floors, the Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin decided to agree to Basayev’s conditions and sign a truce in Chechnya. The terrorists were allowed to retreat safely with lorries, taking their dead and wounded as well as a group of hostages with them. After reaching Chechnya, they released the hostages. Basayev said later that they were able to reach Budyonnovsk (with large trucks filled with terrorists, weapons and equipment) without any problems – they simply bribed the police officers at control points, even those at the Chechen–Russian border. He even said they had actually intended to strike in Moscow, but ran out of bribe money on the way. In total, 166 people were killed, and over 400 were wounded.

This operation shed light on some of the major deficiencies in the Russian approach to combating terrorism: poor skills for dealing with hostage situations, poor coordination, questionable political decisions and corruption within Russian security services, namely the police officers at control points.

¹⁶ Basayev was killed in an explosion in 2006, and Abu Havsk and Dokka Umarov took over command.

3.1.2 Prvomajskoe

On 9 January 1996, a group of 300 Chechen terrorists led by Salman Raduyev¹⁷ invaded the town of Kizlyar in Dagestan and seized another hospital and some surrounding buildings. Terrorists took as many as two or even three thousand hostages, and Raduyev, too, demanded that the Russian Army withdraws from Chechnya and the entire Caucasian region before he would release them. Terrorists seized some important bridges and even planned to take hold of the local airport as a means of escape. When this plan failed, they stayed inside the hospital. A large number of hostages was released after a night of negotiations, but 165 hostages were kept and they left the town in two trucks and 11 buses. The quick and relatively successful operation was most likely due to the threat by local residents that they would not only kill all the terrorists, but also track down and slaughter all their family members in Chechnya unless they released the hostages and leave town. On 10 January, the group reached the Dagestan-Chechnya border just outside the village of Prvomajskoe. Russian forces demolished a bridge, although there was no need to, and planned to attack the group, when terrorists stormed the village and took another 100 hostages, including 37 Russian policemen who offered to be taken in exchange for women and children. The terrorists did not, however, keep their promise to release the women and children. They took refuge in the local school, mosque and hard-built houses. On 13 January, they killed 6 captured policemen and threatened to kill all hostages unless they were allowed to return to Chechnya. The Russian Army then decided to storm the village, and the attack began on the morning of 15 January. After two days of artillery and rocket attacks and special units operations, the situation was still not resolved. Three days after the attack, only 41 hostages were freed. The terrorists upheld the pressure for five whole days, and the Russian Army decided to use the grad multiple-launch rocket system and the infantry to break the terrorists' defense. By then, their sole mission had become to destroy the terrorists at any cost. Finally, on the night of 17 January, Raduyev and most of his people managed to escape to Chechnya. On 19 January, President Yeltsin notified the public that 82 people had been saved, 153 terrorists killed and 30 captured, whereas 26 members of the Russian security services had been killed and 93 had been injured (Džamić, 1999:197). A number of questions arise regarding this event:

- How could it be that the local population had been involved in the Kizlyar operation?
- Why did the Russian forces choose a classical military tactic to solve the hostage situation rather than using anti-terrorist tactics? Attacking terrorists with artillery and MLRS as well as infantry is highly inappropriate as many hostages are bound to be killed and a possibility exists that terrorists may even escape. Rather than dealing with the situation with surgical precision, the Russian Army tried to settle it like butchers would.
- Why did the Russian authorities neglect the GRU military intelligence agency data of 23 December 1995 indicating that Chechen terrorists were preparing an attack similar to the one in Budyonnovsk?

¹⁷ Raduyev was the son-in-law of Chechnya's President and former Soviet Air Force general Dzhokhar Dudayev.

- How could such a large group of terrorists move past all of the Russian control points with all that equipment and weapons?
- Why were the residents of Prvomajskoe not evacuated before the operation?
- Why did the Russian forces not seize the village before the terrorists arrived?
- How could the objectives be modified during the operation itself?
- How could more emphasis be given to destroying terrorists than to freeing hostages?
- How could as many as 100 terrorists, including Raduyev, escape?

And, most importantly - how is it possible that yet another such tragedy took place in Beslan?

3.1.3 Beslan

1. At the start of the Russian school year, at 9.30 on 1 September 2004, 33 terrorists seized School Number One in Beslan, attended by children of elite members of the Ossetian society. This attack was also organized by Shamil Basayev, and it was carried out by Ruslan Tagirovich Khuchbarov (nickname “Colonel”). Basayev later said that the “warriors” (terrorists) included 14 Chechens (of which two were women), nine Ingushes, three Russians and two Arabs. All of them were highly trained and equipped. They mined the school, deployed their snipers and look-out, and installed eight surveillance cameras. They started off by killing some hostages they thought might cause trouble and resist, and they issued a warning that they would retaliate for every death among their number by killing 50 hostages, and every wounded would result in the death of 20. They treated their hostages, mostly children, extremely inhumanely, and wouldn’t let them use the toilet, for example, and even forced them to drink their own urine. When some of the terrorists involved expressed their concerns and dislike for such methods, their leader Khuchbarov shot one dissenting terrorist and blew up two female terrorists who objected to the way the children were being treated. This was the fifth hostage situation in the Russian Federation since 1995. The terrorists demanded that Russian forces withdraw from Chechnya, that all terrorists that had been captured in Ingushetia be released and that President Putin resign from office. Arguably, the real intention was to shed blood and provoke widespread ethnic war throughout the Caucasian region.

Operational headquarters were set up near the elementary school, in Technical School Number 8, under the command of North Ossetia’s President Alexander Dzasokhov. Soon, the Director of FSB Patrushev and the Minister of the Interior Nurgaliev arrived as well. What is very instructive in terms of the relationship the Russian government appears to have with its population and to terrorism, is the decision by the Russian Duma not to return to session during its days off, although the Duma Speaker’s Deputy Rogozin did arrive at Beslan. Admittedly this, including the actions of local and other politicians during the operational stage, naturally turned out to be a mistake.

Two security perimeters were established to seal off the area, but the approach was entirely inappropriate; while the first was set up by members of the 58 Russian

Armada and local police, the inner circle was made up of special unit agents and undisciplined armed local residents causing a lot of chaos. Civilians, particularly armed civilians, have no business in a serious anti-terrorist operation. The Russian public was thus right to question the ability of the authorities in resolving this crisis situation, which was what led parents of the hostages and other local residents to decide to take part in the operation in the first place. In fact, they even warned the special unit agents that they would be killed if they decided to attack the school.

On 3 September, terrorists allowed four members of the Civil Protection Service to take away the bodies of 21 hostages they had killed two days earlier. The terrorist helping them evacuate the bodies spotted an army vehicle and armed local volunteers, which led him to believe the security service was planning to attack. As he started to run back into the school, armed local residents opened fire. This triggered a number of explosions inside the school and caused panic among hostages as terrorists started shooting them. Some believe that at that point the terrorists' intention was not to defend themselves, but merely to kill as many hostages (school children!) as possible. What is hard to comprehend here is that the Vimpel and Alfa special force units allegedly only acted 30 minutes after the shooting had started¹⁸. Fighting lasted until after midnight, when the last terrorist was eliminated.

But that was not the end of the chaos. Official Russian sources provided different data on the number of hostages, victims and even the number of terrorists involved in the siege: whereas official government representatives said there were 354 hostages, the North Ossetia's Ministry for Education claimed there were 1181. The ORT television station reported that 259 hostages had been killed and 531 had been hospitalized, while the spokesman for the President of North Ossetia said that 322 people had died and over 700 had been injured, and the Interfax agency stated that 338 had lost their lives etc. The numbers of killed and arrested terrorists did not match either. For example, the Military Attorney General Sergej Fridinskij said that 30 terrorists had been found dead and one had been arrested, whereas Attorney General Ustinov said that 32 terrorists had been involved in the operation, of which 30 were eliminated, one arrested and one lynched by civilians. Later statements confirmed that one terrorist had indeed been lynched by the crowd, which sheds light on important security issues in the operation. General Andreyev later said that three terrorists had survived the attack, which is in line with Shamil Basayev's statement that 33 "warriors" had taken part in the siege. Controversies also exist regarding the nationality of the terrorists involved. The North Ossetia's FSB leader General Andreyev said as many as 10 terrorists were Arabs and an advisor to President Putin Aslakhonov said there were nine, whereas Basayev spoke of two Arabs.

Furthermore, several other flaws can be highlighted regarding this operation:

- negotiations were led by untrained and inexperienced civilians;
- at first, Russian security forces underestimated the number of terrorists involved (they believed there were 17, where in fact there were 33);

¹⁸ Some sources say the special units had been training just 30 km outside Beslan (e.g. Cohen).

- no real security perimeter was established; instead of preventing unauthorized individuals from accessing the area, such persons were actually used to form this perimeter defense;
- armed local residents and relatives of the hostages were involved in the anti-terrorist operation, which is likely to have caused the bloody outcome;
- surrounding buildings were not evacuated;
- the exact number of hostages remains unclear to this day;
- there was a myriad of press statements given by politicians and other government officials, and most of them were inaccurate. The discrepancies in the number of hostages they spoke about raised fears among the local population that they were in fact preparing to downsize the scale of damage and the total number of victims in subsequent reports;
- after the Beslan school hostage crisis, President Putin said they had underestimated the terrorist threat that Russia and the world were facing. One must wonder how that could have happened after the tragedies in Prvomajskoe and elsewhere.

3.2 Anti-terrorism legislation and other measures

The attitude of people changed in Russia after the tragedy in Beslan; indeed, some call it the Russian 9/11. President Putin said that back then defence and security were neglected and the judiciary and police were corrupt. He said Russia would allocate 27% more funding to security and fighting terrorism in the following year, and promised better funding, better equipment and coordination between all security and intelligence agencies (Plater-Zyberk). Russia would not negotiate with terrorists, but destroy them. The language Putin used in that statement is uncommon for such a high representative: “We will kill them in the shit-house.” (Yeltsin, 2002:289). This is probably more than just a spontaneous reaction of a “real man” (as Yeltsin referred to him), but rather intentional use of primitive language to really get through to terrorists, who use really savage techniques.

In the Soviet Union, two administrative services were responsible for fighting terrorism, i.e. the Fifth Department (so-called ideological) and the K Department (foreign counter-intelligence). In the early 1990s, the newly formed FSB (former KGB) established an Anti-terrorist Centre with similar tasks. In 1999, the Centre became the counterterrorism department, and the service for constitutional regime protection was included therein. Within the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), the CIS counterterrorist center was established with its headquarters in Moscow. In 1998, the Russian Federation adopted the statute “About the fight against terrorism”, which set the legal and organizational framework of fighting terrorism within The Russian Federation for the first time, along with addressing questions of coordination between various segments of the security system and the rights and duties of citizens. It was first amended after the attack on the Nord-Ost theatre in Moscow, and again after Beslan. Then, Putin issued a decree ordering ministries and other authorities in the Russian Federation to draft proposals on how to improve the system. They were given two weeks to prepare their proposals, and the reforms were implemented in the spring of 2005, although many find them purely superficial.

As a rule (before August 2004), hostage situations and other terrorist acts would be handled by operative headquarters under the command of the republic's FSB Director, and »ordinary« crimes involving demands for money would warrant the command of the local head of the Internal Affairs department. But reality was different; in Budyonnovsk, the operative headquarters were first headed by Viktor Erin, the Minister of Internal Affairs, while the FSB Director Stepashin was merely his assistant, and later the Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs General Michail Jegorov took over command. In August 2004, Operational Groups of Russian Forces (GrOU) were established in the Southern Federal District, lead by Russian Army colonels. The head of the GrOU was to automatically take command of the operative headquarters in hostage situations, and would adopt his decisions independently of Moscow politics; the names of GrOU leaders were secret. But in practice, the GrOU head had no powers whatsoever in Beslan. In February 2006, President Putin signed the Anti-terrorism Decree, thereby establishing the National Anti-Terrorism Committee (NAC; Picture 2). This order gave the FSB the leading role in fighting terrorism, whereas the Army is not even mentioned in the document. Regional operative headquarters are now led by local FSB heads. A month later, in March 2006, a new Counter-Terrorism Law was adopted (Rossijskaja sistema). Without a doubt, Russian security forces have become more active and daring since the Beslan school hostage situation.

At the same time, they have increased their international cooperation as well. The former FSB Deputy Director (Anatoli Safonov) was appointed the Russian President's special representative for international cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organized crime in October 2004. In December 2004, the FSB director and FBI head signed a cooperation accord, particularly in the field of fighting against international terrorism and the fight against crimes using weapons of mass destruction. Appointing the special representative is no doubt a step in the right direction, but it does not enable daily exchanges of operative data with other countries' intelligence services. Furthermore, Russian security forces have set up close cooperation with the Israeli counter-terrorism structures, although they are keeping this relatively secret to avoid issues with Arab states. In more ways than one, the Russian security forces have adopted an approach similar to that of the Israelis (coercive fight against terrorism¹⁹).

The Russian Federation now also controls explosives, because it appears that large amounts of explosive materials are in the hands of unauthorised individuals. This led the Russian police to carry out a large operation in 2003 and confiscate as many as 8.1 tons of explosives from unauthorised persons (at that time, 650 tons of explosives were produced in Russia every year). Such operations should be carried out on a regular basis, and accompanied by stricter control of other hazardous substances and firearms.

¹⁹ *Theory and practice also identify proactive, persuasive, defensive and long-term approaches to fighting terrorism.*

Picture 1:

Coordination of counter-terrorism activities in the Russian Federation²⁰



The Committee is made up of: the FSB Director (Head of the Committee), Deputy Head of presidential administration authorities, Minister for the Interior (Deputy President), Deputy Director of the FSB, Deputy President of the Federal Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Duma Speaker's Deputy, Foreign Minister, Minister for Justice, Minister for Health and Social Security, Minister for Transport, Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation etc. The Committee drafts proposals in the field of national counter-terrorism policy and legislation for the President; it coordinates counter-terrorism activities of federal and subordinate bodies; it analyses counter-terrorism measures; it is responsible for international co-operation to combat international terrorism and prepares international agreements for the Russian Federation to conclude in this field; it drafts proposals on social protection for victims of terrorism and counter-terrorist measures etc. The Committee heads the federal operational headquarters, working alongside territorial operative headquarters and counter-terrorism commissions in territories of the Russian Federation.

²⁰ Legend (lines from left to right): President of the Russian Federation, National Anti-Terrorism Committee, Federal operative headquarters, Apparatus of the National Anti-Terrorism Committee and Federal operative headquarters, territorial counter-terrorism commissions of Russian Federation territories, territorial operative headquarters of Russian Federation territories, staff (made up of higher officers of Russian Federation territorial administrations), staff (established under the aegis of territorial security services).

The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation adopted a list of 17 terrorist organisations based on information provided by the FSB and a proposal by the prosecution services.²¹

This list only includes organisations acting against the Russian Federation within its territory. It is interesting to note that Chechen terrorists suggested they would cooperate with Hezbollah and Hamas; Chechens would come to help them fight Israel during the hard winters in the Caucasus, and their allies would come to help them fight their battle in the summer. Hamas and Hezbollah declined. According to General Sapunov, head of the FSB Department for Combating International Terrorism, all 17 organisations are linked in one way or another to the extremist Muslim Brotherhood and strive to establish a caliphate “from the Red Sea to the Caspian” (Borisov, 2006).

Russian sources provide the following definitions of notions related to terrorism:

- Terrorism – violence or the threat to use violence against persons, destruction (damage) or the threat to destroy (damage) property or other things, illegal intervention or the threat of illegal intervention in media and information systems and other acts which threaten the lives of people, cause extensive material damage or other generally dangerous consequences, with the aim of intimidating the population or affecting the decision-making processes by public officials, public authorities, local authorities or international organizations to act in line with the social policy and other terrorists’ interests (Rossijskaja sistema).
- Terrorist – a person in any way involved in terrorist activities (Bezopasnost Evrazii, 2004:407).
- Terrorist activity – criminal activity including: the organisation, planning, preparation and execution of a terrorist operation; instigating terrorist operations, violence against natural persons or organisations, destruction of material goods for the purpose of terrorism; organisation of illegal establishment of armed groups, criminal groups, organised groups performing terrorist operations and taking part in such operations; recruitment, armament, training and the use of terrorists; funding of terrorist organisations or groups or any cooperation with such a group (Bezopasnost Evrazii, 2004:407).

²¹ 1. *Supreme Military Council of the Caucasian Mujahideen*
 2. *Congress of the Nations of Ichkeria and Dagestan*
 3. *al-Qa'ida*
 4. *Asbat al-Ansar*
 5. *Egyptian Islamic Jihad*
 6. *Al-Ghamia-al-Islamia*
 7. *Al-Ihvan al-Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood)*
 8. *Hizb ut-Tahrir*
 9. *Lashkar-e-Toiba*
 10. *Jemaah Islamiya*
 11. *Taliban*
 12. *Islamic Party of Turkestan (former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan)*
 13. *Social Reform Society*
 14. *Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage (Jamiat Ihya at-Turaz al-Islami)*
 15. *Al-Kharamain foundation*
 16. *Islamic Jihad — Jamaat of the Mujahideen*
 17. *Jund Ash Sham*

- Terrorist group – a group of individual who gather(s) to perform terrorist acts; an organisation carrying out terrorist acts or an organisation, a significant part of which is involved in such illegal activities (Bezopasnost Evrazii, 2004:407).
- Terrorist organisation – an organisation which is established to perform terrorist activities or which allows the use of terrorist acts in its activities. An organisation is considered to be a terrorist organisation if one of its elements is involved in terrorist activities and one of its leading bodies knows about this (Bezopasnost Evrazii, 2004: 407).
- International terrorism – violent acts against persons or objects, which are protected under international law (Voениj enciklopedičeskij slovar, 2002:1276).

It is obvious that the notion of terrorism has been given a new dimension since the Soviet era. Today, terrorism is no longer the consequence of activities carried out by “capitalist intelligence” and entails attacks directed against the civilian population as well as the state apparatus.

Conclusion Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in Russia. While the past was marked by terrorism in pursuit of ideological goals (e.g. to oppose Tsarism, anarchism, “red terror” etc.), the greatest terrorist threat to modern Russia takes the form of Islamic terrorism linked with movements by some ethnic groups struggling to gain independence from the Russian Federation. Many of the methods and theories of terrorist movements of the past (at the turn of the 19th century and in the 1960s and 1970s) have also been used by the extreme left in Western Europe (the Red brigades, the RAF, the IRA, ETA etc.). But Western Europe has also adopted some of the anti-terrorist methods of the Tsarist regime; government authorities decided to counter terrorism by secretly supporting other terrorist organisations (e.g. GAL in Spain, Gladio in Italy, the UDA in Ireland etc.). Unlike terrorists in the Tsarist regime, who mainly targeted government officials and authorities, contemporary Russia must deal with “savage terrorism” and its unprecedented methods. Islamic terrorists tend to hurt innocent civilians and attack hospitals, cultural institutions and even elementary schools.

Even though Russia has had to face terrorism for a long time already, it still seems that the Russian Federation has not been able to provide efficient and adequate solutions to defend against it. More often than not, Russian security forces have dealt with hostage situations in an entirely inappropriate way, causing numerous civilian casualties and even allowing the terrorists to escape in the end. This may be due to inadequate and deficient counter-terrorism intelligence, a lack of training, equipment and coordination within Russian security forces, undevised or inadequate procedures to respond to such situations, corruption and a lack of respect for every individual life. Instead of striving to save lives, Russian security forces have often given priority to destroying terrorists at all costs; “surgical precision” thus often had to give way to military combat, often including armed civilians. While the USA focuses on international terrorism, Russia has to battle it on its own ground. But

Picture 2:
Terrorism in
Russia

PERIOD	TYPE OF TERRORIST THREAT	OBJECTIVE	METHOD
Tsarist Russia	Revolutionary	To overthrow the existing social order	Selective attacks against government authorities
Soviet Union	State (internal)	To affirm Soviet rule	Mass terror against the civilian population
Soviet Union	State (external)	To destabilise Western governments	Support to terrorist organisations in the West and in the Third World countries
Russian Federation	Islamic	National independence, the creation of an Islamic state	Unselective mass terrorism (savage terrorism)
Russian Federation	State?	To affirm the existing ruling structures	Selective assassinations against critics

there is at least some resemblance between the two: both the USA and the Russian Federation have embarked on this “war” against terrorism and are trying to defeat it with all available means, including military. After a series of failures, the Russian Federation has introduced significant changes to its counter-terrorism strategies, adopted new legislation and established new bodies to coordinate activities within the system. The leading role has been given to the FSB. But despite some positive results (Russian security forces have succeeded in preventing several terrorist attacks), many experts warn that the changes are largely superficial, whereas the basic problem – Soviet-style bureaucracy – still burdens the system. Even with a special body in charge of coordinating counter-terrorist activities (NAK), Russia still faces the same problem as many other countries – much too often, international cooperation in the field is much more efficient and smooth than within national borders. Furthermore, many accuse Russia of supporting state terrorism to silence the critics of the current political structures.

Russian methods of countering terrorism inevitably affect international cooperation as well. Nevertheless, further cooperation with the Russian Federation is necessary in the fight against terrorism. We must realise we have a common enemy²², and that there is no such thing as good or bad terrorism. In light of this, the following could prove valuable:

- further exchange of intelligence information on terrorists;
- sharing past experience on fighting terrorism based on concrete examples;
- assistance in providing adequate equipment to Russian security forces;
- assistance in finding suitable organizational structures to coordinate and command various segments of the counter-terrorism security system;

²² *I witnessed some Western colleagues mocking a Russian Army general as he talked about Chechen terrorists, pointing out that we are all in the same boat.*

- assistance in adopting appropriate legislation which must enable efficient counter-terrorism activities, at the same time guaranteeing the protection of civilian lives and human rights.

Furthermore, we should analyse closely the past experiences of the Russian Federation and the wider Soviet Union; a careful study of the modus operandi of various terrorist groups in the Russian Federation, their recruitment methods, funding, equipment, training, their objectives, etc. would provide a valuable insight for our region as well. And an analysis of the responses to terrorism by Russian security forces would allow us to identify the weaknesses in the fight against terrorism that our region and our countries must deal with just as much as the Russian Federation does.

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