

Terrorism Ultimately Costs Citizens Their Freedom

By [Paul Goble](#)

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About this column

[Window on Eurasia](#) covers current events in Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, with a focus on issues of ethnicity and religion. The issues covered are often not those written about on the front pages of newspapers. Instead, the articles in the Windows series focus on those issues that either have not been much discussed or provide an approach to stories that have been. Frequent topics include civil rights, radicalism, Russian Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and events in the North Caucasus, among others.

Author Paul Goble is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. He has served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau as well as at the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes frequently on ethnic and religious issues and has edited five volumes on ethnicity and religion in the former Soviet space.

When a terrorist incident occurs in Russia, a Moscow commentator says, it is unlikely to cost

even those officials whose responsibilities included preventing it their jobs, but experience with earlier cases suggests that such incidents will likely cost the Russian people their freedoms without providing them with any additional security.

In a commentary in Wednesday's [Novaya Gazeta](#), Andrey Lipsky wrote that where governments see themselves as the servants of the people, a terrorist incident is likely to lead to "a rapid change of political power" — or at least the ouster of officials responsible for security — as well as to "serious measures for increasing the security of citizens. And often both together."

But in a country like Russia, he continues, officials view terrorist acts as another reminder that they "are not in a position to fulfill their chief function — the defense of their fellow citizens" and consequently are convinced that at the very least they should exploit the situation to retain their "own control over the country."

The experience of the last dozen years is both instructive and disturbing. After a series of explosions in 1999 killed more than 200 people, then-President Vladimir Putin not only launched his political career but used these terrorist actions as the occasion for severely restricting press freedom by means of "anti-terrorist" amendments to media laws.

Then, after the Nord-Ost tragedy in 2002, Putin moved to tighten control of the media even more closely. Again, in 2004, after the Moscow metro bombing, Putin launched the career of Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya. And finally, after the Beslan hostage tragedy, Putin transformed the political system in ways that did little to promote the population's security but a great deal to protect his.

After that event, he eliminated the election of governors, suppressed single-mandate districts for the Duma and introduced other "anti-democratic changes in the electoral system as a whole." Consequently, after each terrorist action, Russians ask themselves not what will be done to make them safer but what will be done to them in the name of doing so.

That is a question Russians are asking once again in the wake of Monday's twin metro bombings, Lipsky says. And they are doing so with particular urgency because they know that "it is difficult to escape bad habits," that the beginnings of the campaign will encourage populism and that the regime is disturbed by the increasing numbers of demonstrations and meetings.

Clear evidence that many Russians are worried about these things was offered by two other commentators Wednesday. In a posting on [politcom.ru](#), Ivan Yartsev asks whether President Dmitry Medvedev will be "a guarantor [of the Russian Constitution, as his job description requires] or the terminator" of what democratic arrangements it provides.

Despite his frequent statements about the importance of law and a legal state, Medvedev since the terrorist attacks has sounded quite similar to Putin in his commitment to "find and destroy" all those responsible rather than to bring them to justice as the Constitution and Russian laws require.

In his remarks, Yartsev says, Medvedev appears to have forgotten his duties, and "as a result of populist competition between the members of the ruling tandem, the positions of Russia

in the Caucasus may continue to be weakened as a result of the 'illegal' positions of the law enforcement organs" that the country's political leaders are calling for.

Clearly, Yartsev concludes, the powers that be in Moscow do not understand that "extrajudicial reprisals over the leaders of the terrorists will permit their comrades in arms to create around the destroyed bandits the auto of martyrdom," something that will lead to more, not fewer, terrorist attacks in Russia in the future.

And writing in Novaya Gazeta today, Yulia Latynina argues that "sick and health state organisms" react very differently to Salafite terrorism. The United States, she says, seeks to oppose the ideas of the Salafites, and "the American special services struggle against terrorism rather than rob Khodorkovsky" (www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2010/033/02.html).

As a result, the outspoken Moscow commentator points out, "since September 11, there have not been any terrorist acts in the United States," an enviable record compared to Russia's, where not only have there been multiple terrorist incidents in the past but where more are likely in the future.

The basic reason, Latynina insists, is that the country's siloviki do exactly the opposite. They would rather steal from businessmen than fight "such an unappetizing and dangerous opponent as terrorists." And she suggests an analogy with the flu: "For a health organism, this is only a passing illness. For a state weakened by excess and corruption, the illness can be fatal."

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