

Russians Now Face-to-Face With Terrorism

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.

VIENNA — Now that the initial shock of the March 29 metro attacks has worn off,

Russians are beginning to ask where the terrorists are likely to strike next and what measures the powers that be, which have been singularly unsuccessful in preventing attacks in the past, may now put in place in order to prevent them.

On Monday, Versiya.ru published two articles that address these issues, asking [first](#) where future attacks are likely and, [second](#), what authorities are likely to try to do to prevent a recurrence of last week's metro and how peoples' everyday lives are likely to be affected.

The conclusions of the two articles are not reassuring: On the one hand, the first article concludes that more terrorist attacks are likely to take place in Russia in the coming months. And on the other, the second suggests that the siloviki, in large part because of their corrupt nature, are not in a position to defend Russians as well as are police agencies in other countries.

The three "versions" Versiya journalist Mikhail Yakovlev offers — the breaking out of a terrorist war "across all of Russia," the continuation of the war at approximately the same level, and the likelihood of "new terrorist attacks" soon — are about equally probable, but all suggest that Russians not just in the North Caucasus will have to deal with more such acts in the future.

Indeed, the most important consequence of the terrorist attack in the Moscow metro is that Russians are facing up to the reality that terrorism is not something far away but close at hand, and that no one can provide them with the assurance that all attacks can and will be prevented.

Nonetheless, as Vadim Saranov points out in the second Versiya article, the Russian powers that be are committed to trying to do just that. At a meeting in Makhachkala, President Dmitry Medvedev promised to make the struggle with terrorism "more harsh and with even harsh measures."

But many doubt that this will dissuade those who are prepared to sacrifice their lives to carry out such attacks and some fear that increasing the use of force in the North Caucasus and killing more potential terrorists may have the unintended consequence of helping those who support the use of terror to recruit people willing to carry out such acts.

The sense that force won't be enough and that socioeconomic changes won't be quick enough to counter terrorism has focused attention on a variety of other suggestions, including fingerprinting the population or collecting DNA for large segments of the population, as possible crime fighting techniques.

While these are technically possible, most experts say, they would be expensive and not necessarily effective. Moreover, as some rights activists have pointed out, they would open the way to abuse, giving the militia and the FSB the kind of data sets that these agencies might use to bring charges against entirely innocent people.

Lev Ponomaryev, a Moscow rights activist, told Versiya that he was certain that people in the North Caucasus would find ways around any registration system, including fingerprinting, and that he fears that the powers that be would use them inappropriately. After all, recent research suggests that 30 percent of those now incarcerated were convicted

with fraudulent evidence.

Because of those shortcomings, he said, he "does not see any serious arguments in favor of such measures but many arguments against." And consequently, he said, he is "categorically against" the collection of such data. Others may agree, but that does not mean that the powers that be won't try to come up with what appear to be a magic bullet against terrorism.

Several officials have proposed banning anonymous SIM cards so that the militia will be able to trace calls. Others have called for requiring anyone getting on an intercity bus to show picture identification, and a few have even suggested requiring identification before getting on the Moscow metro, something that could introduce major delays.

The variety of proposed solutions, Saranov suggests, leads to "the conclusion that today there do not exist any means" of providing a guarantee against future attacks. Still more disturbing, it appears that at least some of the proposals are intended to put more money in the pockets of officials than to provide security for Russians.

Kirill Kabanov, who heads the National Anti-Corruption Committee, notes that "we theoretically have all the means we need for the struggle with terrorism. Work should begin at the level of the individual mitiaman." He should observe and pass on information to the FSB, "where it can be systematized" and acted upon.

But unfortunately, that is only "in theory." In Russia now, militiamen are more interested in taking 5,000 rubles (\$170) from illegal immigrants than in fighting terrorism. And "the special services today are more occupied with controlling businesses and resolving business questions with the procuracy and the militia."

"Corrupt law enforcement organs cannot struggle with terrorism," Kabanov says. If other Russians reach that conclusion and if more terrorist attacks follow, that alone may do more to transform Russian social, economic and political arrangements than any demonstrations the opposition may stage.

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