**21 st Century Terrorism**

By Bruce Hofiman

Five bombings in four weeks. The targets: a downtown shopping mall, a military housing complex and three apartment buildings. The victims: civilians or the families of serving military personnel either asleep in their beds or out for an evening on the town. The death toll: at least 350 persons, with scores more injured and maimed. The perpetrators: unknown. The reason for the attacks: unclear. Welcome to terrorism, 21st century-style.

At a time when the United States is obsessed with more exotic threats like bioterror, cy-berteiror and agroterror, these incidents in Russia and Dagestan underscore how terrorists can still achieve their dual aim of fear and intimidation through conventional means and traditional methods: using bombs to blow things up. This has important implications for countert-errorism preparedness. As fanatical and irrational as terrorists often appear, they remain conservative operationally.

In other respects, too, the string of deadly explosions that has convulsed Russia is not without precedent. Nor can it be written off as some isolated phenomenon inspired by recondite historical enmities. Rather, the bombings conform to a pattern of terrorism evident throughout the 1990s: The most heinous and lethal attacks, those directed against civilians, go unclaimed. This development contrasts with the modus operandi of the first generation of modern terrorists who surfaced during the 1970s and 1980s. They not only proudly claimed credit for particularly bloody attacks, but generally issued detailed communiques explaining precisely why they had carried out their operations.

True, a large number of terrorist attacks have gone unclaimed. According to a Rand report published in 1985, upward of 60 percent of international terrorist incidents recorded between 1980-82, and 39 percent of those that occurred in the 1970s, were never claimed. The most deadly terrorist incidents of the 1990s have never been credibly claimed, much less explained or justified as terrorist acts once were.

Among these are: the series of car and truck bombings that rocked Bombay in 1993, killing 317 persons; the huge truck bomb that destroyed a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1994, killing 86; the truck bomb that demolished the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, leaving 168 dead in 1995; the series of bombings in Paris that occurred the same year between July and October and left eight dead and 200 wounded; and last summer's bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, in which 224 persons perished and thousands more were wounded. The 1988 in-flight bombing of Pan Am 103, in which 270 persons perished, is an especially notorious example.

Although two alleged Libyan government intelligence operatives were identified and accused of placing the suitcase containing the bomb that eventually found its way onto the plane, no believable claim of responsibility has ever been issued.

That terrorists today do not feel as driven to take credit for their acts may be related to their belief that their message, whatever it may be, is still reaching its intended audience. As the renowned terrorism expert Walter Laqueur has observed, "If terrorism is propaganda by the deed, the success of a terrorist campaign depends decisively on the amount of publicity it receives." In this respect, terrorists are still getting all the publicity they crave, but they are manipulating and exploiting it in different ways. By maintaining their anonymity, terrorists may believe they are better able to capitalize on fear and alarm. Attacks perpetrated by enigmatic, unseen and unknown assailants may thus be deliberately designed to foment greater insecurity and panic in the target audience. In this way, the terrorists’ ability to portray themselves as being able to strike whenever and wherever they please, while highlighting the government's inability to protect potential targets, is appreciably heightened. The terrorists appear stronger, the government weak and powerless to stop the mayhem.

Terrorists have long sought to embarrass governments and undermine public confidence in their leaders. Even when they issue no claim, the perpetrators may believe they are still effectively harming their enemy and achieving their ultimate objective. They may also be confident that even if their message is not clearly understood, the suspicion aroused by even an anonymous attack is sufficient reward in itself.

The current situation in Russia illuminates the challenges faced by other countries confronted with terrorist threats. The potentially corrosive effects of fear and uncertainty on civil liberties and constitutional safeguards are already evident: Russian authorities and the Russian public have singled out Chechen, Dagestani, Ingush and other swarthy, dark-haired immigrants from the Caucasus. Discriminated against in the best of times, they have been subjecte.d to withering scrutiny despite assurances from President Boris Yeltsin that no one ethnic group or people would be targeted for attention.

The ease with which Russia has been thrown into panic by a handful of men using entirely conventional terrorist weapons and tactics suggests that terrorists can still ably achieve their objectives of fear and intimidation without having to resort to more exotic weaponry or futuristic tactics.

This is an important lesson for the United States, where the focus of current counterterrorism efforts has been on low-probability, high-consequence terrorist incidents using weapons of mass of destruction. Attention on this high-end threat, therefore, should not be at the expense of higher-probability, lower-consequence incidents, such as ordinary terrorist bombings.

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**Fight Against Terror; Don’t Resort to it**

The great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin once wrote with bitterness that "the only European in Russia is the government." And this despite how he suffered at the hands of the tsar's government and especially the tsar's censorship. I recalled the genius' paradoxical phrase when — a few days after the anti-Caucasian bacchanalia in the press— Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced, "We can't confuse the bandits who are operating on the territory of Chechnya with the Chechen people, who are also their victims."

A war against terror must not be turned into terror against the people. We lost the Chechen war of 1994-96 precisely because from the very beginning

— with the massive, senseless bombing of Grozny

— the war was turned against the people, leading to the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians. We won the August war in Dagestan precisely because it was fought in the people's defense.

In order to win a war with bandits and terrorists in Chechnya, we have to clearly announce to ourselves and to the Chechens what the goals and tasks of our policy in Chechnya are to be. This means guaranteeing the safety of our borders and the liquidation of the cradles of terrorism in Chechnya. We have to convince the majority of Chechens to support these intentions. We have to give Chechen President Asian Maskhadov a chance. We must cease threatening Chechnya every day from the pages of newspapers and televisions with the wholesale destruction of its residents. Then, after we have accomplished these tasks jointly with Chechnya’s legal government, we can discuss the region's status, including its sovereignty.

We must also say that we don't plan to forcibly hold Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation against its will, nor do we plan to punish it should it wish to leave. On this subject, Dagestan^ defensive reaction to the Chechen troops pouring over its borders shows that we are not in danger of a domino effect should Chechnya secede.

The great Russian civilization cannot roll down the path to the destruction of an entire ethnicity, no matter how difficult the last 100 years of relations with this ethnicity have been. Here, the matter is not world public opinion. As concerns world public opinion, we wouldn't have any trouble at all.

For example, in 1996, in the heat of the crudest and most senseless bombardments of Chechnya, President Bill Clinton, on a visit to Moscow, publicly supported President Boris Yeltsin and compared him to Abraham Lincoln, struggling to hold the union together.

And now, the quotes of Western politicians — especially off the record ones — are beginning to reflect the motif of understanding Russia's role as a shield protecting civilization from the "barbarian hordes." But here we risk more than just falling into a trap. We are in danger of geopolitical catastrophe. With every public pronouncement sounding in Russia about the wholesale destruction of the Chechen ethnicity, with every "mistake" that happens during "surgical strikes on terrorist bases," we are begetting thousands more potential suicide bombers who will come to our cities. Such a final solution to the "Chechen question" would once and for all turn all Islamic opinion against Russia. Satan No. 2 — as the Ayatollah Khomeini used to call the Soviet Union — would be graduated in the eyes of the Moslem world to Satan No. 1, crowding the United States out of its honored position.