

Violence Flares in Dagestan After Militant Leader's Death

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A wave of coordinated attacks swept Dagestan after authorities dealt Islamist militants a heavy blow over the weekend by killing a local rebel leader blamed for the Moscow metro bombings.

But analysts said the surge in violence — which included two car bombs, shootings and kidnappings that killed at least seven people and injured three others — was not necessarily revenge for the death of Magomedali Vagabov, whom authorities have said organized the twin blasts in the Moscow metro on March 29 that killed 40 people.

“We only think of it as a response because the attacks happened in one day, but these kinds of coordinated attacks also regularly happen in Ingushetia,” said Andrei Soldatov, a security analyst with the Agentura.ru think tank.

He said that while law enforcement agencies were trying to decapitate the insurgency by

singling out and killing its leaders, the militants were “expanding their arsenal” by learning to coordinate the actions of independent rebel cells.

In the Dagestani attacks, the partly decapitated bodies of two border guards and a forest worker were found after the group disappeared when they left a border post Saturday night.

The body of one border guard, a lieutenant colonel, was found Monday, while the other, his personal driver, was found Sunday, news reports said.

The body of a forest worker who had accompanied the officers was also found Monday.

All three had their throats cut.

A second forest worker in the group was missing.

Also, four suspected suicide bombers died in separate car explosions in the villages of Gubden and Kalinovka early Monday, Interfax reported.

The blast in Kalinovka, which killed two people inside the car, was probably caused by a malfunction of a suicide bomber’s belt, a police spokesman told Interfax. It was unclear what caused the other explosion, which also killed two people inside the automobile.

Elsewhere, unknown assailants shot the deputy mayor of Kizlyar, Vasily Naumochkin, at point-blank range in the city’s center Monday,

Gazeta.ru reported. The attackers escaped in a car, and Naumochkin was hospitalized with an unspecified spinal injury.

In the town of Derbent, a police roadblock came under fire from unknown assailants carrying machine guns early Monday, Interfax said. No policemen were harmed, but stray bullets injured a 5-year-old girl and a 19-year-old woman living in nearby houses.

The violence came after Saturday’s death of Vagabov, called the right hand and possible successor of Doku Umarov, head of the North Caucasus militants. Vagabov was blocked by law enforcement officers in a house in the Dagestani town of Gunib and killed after refusing to surrender.

Vagabov, who unsuccessfully tried to break out of the house during negotiations, opened fire at the officers who surrounded the house, but was killed along with four other militants, Kommersant reported Monday.

His last words were “I’m injured ... I’m leaving for paradise,” the report said, citing militant web sites that one of Vagabov’s associates called by telephone during their standoff.

In the hours after Vagabov’s death, a gang of suspected militants staged a series of attacks while cruising the streets of Dagestan’s capital, Makhachkala, killing three people, including a policeman and a military officer, the report said.

In seemingly unrelated violence still indicative of tensions in Dagestan, a local election dispute in the village of Babayurt ended with a shootout that killed one person and led to the

temporary blockade of a federal highway Sunday, Interfax reported.

The conflict flared after several unidentified young men prevented local deputy prosecutor Eldar Karagishev from registering as a candidate to run as district head in elections scheduled for October by stealing the registration papers, RIA–Novosti reported.

Shortly afterward, an unidentified gunman fired at a crowd of Karagishev’s supporters, killing one and injuring four, the report said. “A verbal exchange transformed into a mass brawl accompanied by a shootout,” a police officer told Interfax.

The incident prompted about 200 supporters of Karagishev to hold an improvised rally on the Kavkaz federal highway, which runs between Astrakhan and Makhachkala.

The protesters, who demanded the dismissal of the Babayurt district head and local police officials, blocked the road for several hours but dispersed after meeting with Dagestan’s deputy prime minister.

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