

Attack Puts Focus on Fuzzy Security

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Domodedovo Airport management were the first to bear the brunt of the Kremlin's anger over Monday's suicide bombing that killed 35 people, with President Dmitry Medvedev threatening punishment for lax security and demanding tougher screening measures.

But the security gap that allowed the bomber to enter the public waiting area of the airport's international arrivals hall lies with the transportation police, not with airport management or screening equipment like metal detectors and X-ray machines, security analysts said Tuesday.

Complicating matters, Russian law is fuzzy on who is responsible for what on airport security.

But even then, little could have been done to prevent the attack in a zone that is low security at most airports worldwide, analysts said.

Medvedev on Tuesday called for a "tougher system of checks" on passengers. He did not elaborate, but an aviation source told Interfax that visitor access to arrival halls might be

limited.

“The situation shows there were obvious violations. And those who are making decisions, including the airport management, will be held accountable,” Medvedev said, speaking in an [interview](#) with Vedomosti, portions of which were released ahead of Wednesday's publication.

A Domodedovo spokeswoman said the privately operated airport had done its job by providing security for checked-in passengers, noting that the waiting area where the blast occurred was the responsibility of the transportation police.

“We hope we won't be blamed because our security services were working well,” the spokeswoman, Yelena Galanova, told reporters.

The Investigative Committee said it opened a criminal case into the violation of safety rules at the airport. The agency will investigate the conduct of "a range of law enforcement agencies as well as of the airport's management," the committee said in a statement. If convicted, officials may face up to seven years in jail, the statement said.

Most international airports allow free access to their arrival zones, and beefing up security at Domodedovo by installing more metal detectors would only create long lines and delays while providing no guarantee of safety, said Maxim Agarkov, an independent security analyst.

“It is impossible to install metal detectors at every entry to the airport. People would stand in lines for five to six hours," said Agarkov, a former Interior Ministry official. "It is important to create balance between security and convenience."

Extra security and the accompanying headaches for travelers would play right into the attackers' hands, said Alexander Ivanchenko, acting head of the Security Industry Association, an alliance of private security companies.

“This is exactly what the terrorists are trying to achieve: to create disorder,” he said.

Domodedovo stepped up security after two outgoing planes were blown up by suicide bombers in 2004, killing 88. State-of-the-art security equipment, including a SafeScout 100 screening system, has been installed at the airport, Agarkov said.

One problem that should be addressed is the poor feeding of dogs trained to sniff out explosives, he said. “Some of the dogs just get hungry and are mostly interested in looking for sandwiches in passengers' bags,” Agarkov said.

But it's the human — not the canine — factor that is the biggest issue, analysts said.

Both the transportation police and private security guards hired by the airport need more training to prevent terrorist attacks, Ivanchenko said.

Agarkov said airport security personnel consist largely of retired police officers who do not undergo regular training, while the people who man metal detectors get little training and are overworked.

“A human being is only able to focus on something for 40 minutes and then needs to be

changed,” which does not happen now, he said.

Russian airports in general offer lax security outside the check-in zones, the aviation source told Interfax.

This sentiment is shared by Arkady Lifshits, head of the Arli Special Equipment company, which deals in security equipment.

“Territories around the airports are a breeding ground for rats, cockroaches and terrorists,” he told The Moscow Times.

Meanwhile, a question is hanging over who is actually responsible for airport safety.

Medvedev told Vedomosti that he had asked the Prosecutor General's Office to look into the situation at Domodedovo. But in a separate meeting with Federal Security Service officials, he said both the airport management and the Interior Ministry must share the blame for the bombing and called for the dismissal and punishment of negligent state officials.

“The president is right in asking the Interior Ministry to find the people accountable for the situation because the transportation police bear responsibility for the situation,” State Duma Security Committee member Alexander Khinshtein told reporters.

The Interior Ministry was made responsible for airport security under a 2005 law. Previously, the Transportation Ministry handled the matter.

But Viktor Gorbachev, head of the industry lobby group Airport Association, said current airport legislation does not clearly separate the responsibilities of the transportation police and private security guards.

“This means no one is responsible” for airport security, he said.

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