

4 Police Officials Fired Over Domodedovo Bombing

By [Alexandra Odynova](#)

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U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle laying flowers at the site of the explosion at Domodedovo Airport on Wednesday. **Sergey Ponomarev**

President Dmitry Medvedev fired four police officials over the suicide bombing at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport that killed 35, while Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said the attackers' trail probably did not lead back to Chechnya.

Medvedev's decision to dismiss officials just two days after the explosion in Moscow's busiest airport broke a pattern set by his predecessor, Putin, of not punishing officials over terrorist attacks or other catastrophes.

But analysts said Medvedev had been forced to act in light of upcoming State Duma elections in December and the presidential vote next year.

Medvedev fired Andrei Alexeyev, head of the Interior Ministry's transportation branch in the

Central Federal District, the Kremlin said on its web site Wednesday.

The transportation police are responsible for providing security in the public areas of airports, including Domodedovo's international arrivals hall where Monday's attack occurred.

Domodedovo Airport's police chief and two of his deputies also lost their jobs, Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev said.

Medvedev signaled that more dismissals might follow.

"Shake up the entire transportation police," Medvedev [told](#) Nurgaliyev at a meeting in the presidential Gorki residence outside Moscow. "If those people don't understand how to work, we will find other people."

Alexeyev, 54, took up his post only in August after working in railroad security. He received a state award in 1996 when he traded himself for a hostage held at an Omsk theater, Omskpress.ru [said](#) in August. No details of the incident were immediately available.

No state officials were fired in the aftermath of the last major terrorist attack in Moscow, two suicide bombings in the metro that killed 40 in March. Putin developed a reputation for his reluctance to sack officials after terrorist attacks.

Medvedev simply had no choice after Monday's attack because public support for him and Putin, who say they rule the country as a tandem, would have suffered, said Alexei Mukhin, an analyst with the Center for Political Information.

"The president just did what all levels of society expected from him," Mukhin said by telephone.

Nikolai Petrov, a political analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the dismissals would help cover Medvedev's embarrassment of failing to prevent the airport attack after the metro bombing. "He needs to show that the authorities are acting efficiently," Petrov said.

He added, however, that Medvedev and no one else could do much to stop people determined to stage terrorist attacks.

Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for the Moscow metro bombings. Putin said the Domodedovo blast probably had nothing to do with Chechnya.

"According to preliminary information, this terrorist act has no relation to the Chechen republic," Putin told reporters.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov was handpicked for office by Putin, and analysts suspect the two have an arrangement under which Kadyrov receives federal support for his rule in exchange for assurances that North Caucasus insurgents will be prevented from carrying out attacks across Russia.

Investigators have remained silent on who might have staged the Domodedovo explosion, but unidentified law enforcement sources have told Russian news agencies that a hitherto unknown Stavropol-based rebel group called Nogai Battalion might have been responsible.

The bombing might have been revenge for a raid last fall by security services in the Stavropol region, which borders the volatile North Caucasus republics, in which members of the group were arrested and killed.

The identity and gender of Monday's bomber also remain unclear, although NTV television on Tuesday night showed the severed [head](#) of a man whom it identified as the bomber.

Some news reports said the man was accompanied by a woman at the airport.

Moskovsky Komsomolets said he might have had two companions and "unofficial evidence" shows two terrorists died in the blast.

"Federal Security Service investigators had shown great interest in two unidentified bodies," the report said, citing unidentified law enforcement sources.

The suspected bomber, who appears to be 30 to 35, is not from the North Caucasus but most likely from southern Europe and is perhaps French, Italian or Arab, said Tatyana Baluyeva, a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Komsomolskaya Pravda reported Wednesday.

A law enforcement source later told Itar-Tass that the bomber's complexion resembled an African. "He has a high forehead, thick lips, possibly dark skin and curly dark hair. Somehow he looks like a black," the source said.

Nevertheless, investigators seemingly kept the "Caucasus trail" alive.

"Detectives have a hypothesis that he is from the North Caucasus," a law enforcement source told Interfax, adding that computer-enhanced portraits of the suspect had been sent to police stations in the region.

Some reports also said the masterminds of the attack initially intended to strike on New Year's, sending a suicide bomber into a crowd on Manezh Square but failing because of an unexpected text message.

The bomb, which used a cell phone as a trigger, went off hours earlier in a house that the terrorists rented in the Kuzminki district in southeastern Moscow because of an automated text message from the network operator congratulating users on the New Year, Moskovsky Komsomolets [reported](#) Wednesday, citing an intelligence source.

The bombs in Domodedovo and Kuzminki were of the same type, Kommersant [reported](#).

Moreover, part of the terrorist group behind the Domodedovo blast was detained in December, Federation Council Senator Vladimir Kulakov said Wednesday, Interfax reported. He said corruption at law enforcement agencies might have been the reason why the arrests did not prevent further attacks.

The Lifenews.ru tabloid [said](#) its reporters managed to smuggle a fake bomb onto the premises of Domodedovo Airport on Wednesday despite stepped up security precautions.

Meanwhile, all 35 people killed in Monday's attack were identified Wednesday, the Emergency

Situations Ministry said.

The [list](#), published on the ministry's web site, consists of 27 Russians and eight foreigners. Earlier, the ministry had named seven foreigners, but one more, an Austrian woman born in 1961, was only identified late Tuesday. Heidemarie Wallner was a staff member with Deutsche Bank in Vienna and on a business trip to Moscow, company spokesman Dmitry Agishev told The Moscow Times.

Wallner is the second Austrian killed in the blast. The other is Nikolai Ivanov, 42, a Bulgarian-born representative of the Bene Office furniture producer who was also on a business trip, Nachrichten.at news site reported.

Also killed was German Hendrik Minderop, who was supposed to visit a Russian affiliate of his employer, heating supplier Vaillant, German media said.

The other foreigners included two Tajiks, one Uzbek, Ukrainian playwright Anna Mashutina and British property consultant Gordon Cousland.

The oldest victim was 86: Nikolai Yurashku, a former collective farm manager from the Moscow region who had come with his son-in-law and his granddaughter's husband to the airport to welcome arriving friends from Canada, Moskovsky Komsomolets reported, adding that all three died in the blast. The youngest victim was Irina Petrunina, born in 1991.

Of those injured in the blast, 117 remained hospitalized, according to the Health and Social Development Ministry's [web site](#).

Three were in critical condition, and another 24 were being treated for serious injuries, Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova [told](#) Putin during a meeting Wednesday, Interfax reported.

The ministry said Tuesday that 110 people were hospitalized, but more victims sought assistance later, Golikova said.

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