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Terrorists and Spooks

By Alexei Bayer

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Each new terrorist attack, such as the one that struck Domodedovo Airport a week ago, deepens my sense of despair. Not that each new outrage is worse than the previous one. They are all gruesome. New strikes confirm that these are not isolated acts of unbalanced or fanatical people. There is a subculture of death out there. The next blow is only a matter of time.

There will always be tight security, metal detectors, body scanners, no-fly lists and background checks. National security establishments will continue to grow.

I hate conspiracy theories. I don't for a moment believe that the World Trade Center was blown up on Sept. 11, 2001, by agents trained and funded by the administration of then-U.S. President George W. Bush or that Israeli intelligence services engineered the hijackings, telling every Jew in New York to stay away from downtown Manhattan that day. Nevertheless, every major terrorist attack produces a number of discrepancies and gray areas that give rise to legitimate accusations of incompetence on the part of security agencies and, in too many cases, leave room for an even darker interpretation of the facts.

Then there is the absolute meaninglessness of those brutal acts. Terrorists of every stripe have used increasingly bloody means to advertise their goals, but not one of them has ever been achieved. The Irish failed to bomb the British out of Northern Ireland, the Palestinians didn't get their state, and Washington still keeps troops in Saudi Arabia, which remains Osama bin Laden's main gripe against the Great Satan. Chechen separatists have done their cause irreparable harm by their campaign of terror, alienating even sympathetic Russians and turning world public opinion sharply against them. What did Monday's explosion accomplish except destroy 35 innocent lives, among them the brilliant young playwright Anna Yablonskaya? Her death brought terror home to the British theater community, where she was well known.

There will always be individuals willing to blow themselves up out of despair or revenge. It is harder to understand the rationale of those who send them to die and kill.

International cooperation is key in preventing terrorist attacks. Security establishments everywhere must share knowledge freely — how to penetrate and disrupt terrorist networks and what security measures are most effective to prevent attacks from happening. Israel has had success in ending the rash of suicide bombings using these methods. The New York police department routinely sends anti-terrorist experts to study each major attack.

International investigations of terrorist attacks would be useful and should become the norm, but they rarely happen. Investigations are conducted in extreme secrecy both from the public and from foreign security agencies perhaps because terrorist attacks are used by politicians to further their own aims or because police fear to reveal their incompetence,

Even though there have been terrorist attacks throughout history, terrorism became widespread only after World War II. Similarly, various spy and cloak-and-dagger agencies grew out of the war and expanded dramatically during the Cold War. Their growth has only accelerated in recent decades. Every country now has a vast hidden network that has access to all of the resources of the modern state but operates in secrecy from both the public and the spooks' ostensible masters, the politicians. It is a powerful fraternity and in some countries — such as in Russia — they have come to power and have taken over the government and business.

Terrorism and security establishments have risen hand in hand over the past 60 years. Both are likely to continue to grow.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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