The Moscow Times
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Suicide Bombers Strike in Caucasus

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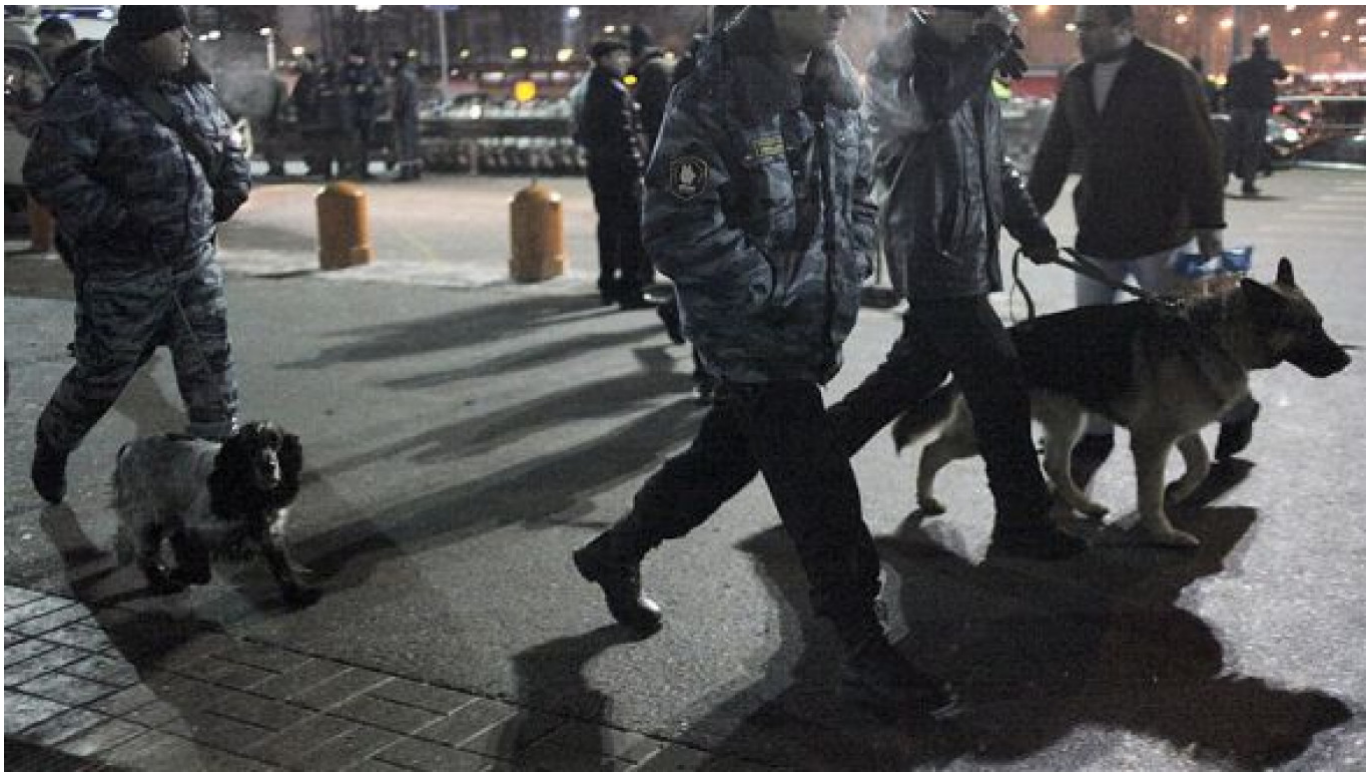
February 15, 2011



Moscow policemen on high alert during their patrol in the wake of the Domodedovo Airport bombing. According to commander-in-chief of the Interior Troops Nikolai Rogozhkin, a large-scale operation is
Diana Morkosian

Warnings about continuing attacks similar to last month's Domodedovo Airport blast came true this week as a wave of suicide bombings swept through the North Caucasus, even as police reported the situation was "under control."

Meanwhile, a media report indicated that the Domodedovo bomber, who killed 36, spent more than an hour strolling freely around the airport, high on drugs and with a bomb bulging under his clothes, before blowing himself up.

Attacks by two suicide bombers killed two Interior Ministry officers and injured 27 others in Dagestan late Monday, while in Chechnya's capital Grozny, two rebels blew themselves up after being holed up in a building Tuesday.

Also Tuesday, five suspected rebels were killed in the Stavropol region.

The first Dagestani suicide bomber blew herself up at about 7 p.m. in the village of Gubden after guards at the door of a local administration building stopped her from entering, the republic's Interior Ministry said in a statement.

The blast killed an officer of the Interior Troops and heavily injured five others, all of whom were hospitalized.

The second bomber struck some four hours later when his car was stopped at a police checkpoint, also in Gubden. He killed a policeman and seriously injured 22 other law enforcement officers.

The bombers were tentatively identified as reported rebel Vitaly Razdobudko and his wife Maria Khoroshyova, a spokesperson for the Dagestani branch of the Investigative Committee told Interfax on Tuesday.

Razdobudko, 32, is believed to be a member of Nogai Jamaat, an obscure rebel group raided by law enforcement officers in October.

He has been linked to last year's blasts in Pyatigorsk and Moscow, as well as a failed bombing in Stavropol. The Moscow blast, which left one person dead on New Year's Eve, is believed to have occurred with the malfunction of a bomb that the victim was supposed to set off in a crowd on Manezh Square later that day.

Some reports linked the New Year's blast and the Domodedovo attack, but law enforcement agencies denied the connection later.

The Monday bombings could have been masterminded by the Dagestan rebel leader Ibragimkhalil Daudov, a Dagestani law enforcement source told RIA-Novosti. Daudov took up his post after his predecessor was killed in combat in August.

In Grozny on Tuesday, police blocked two suspected rebels in an apartment building and ordered them to surrender. But they refused, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov told Interfax.

The rebels fired at the police, and then one of them blew himself up, killing both insurgents, Kadyrov said. He identified the bomber as Ibragim Gakayev.

No casualties among police or local residents, who were evacuated in advance, were reported. Police discovered more explosives in the apartment.

In the Stavropol region, a gunfight between policemen and alleged rebels left five insurgents and three officers dead Tuesday, a local police spokesperson told Interfax, adding that three more officers were injured.

Four of the rebels were identified as people who attacked a police convoy in the neighboring republic of Karachayevo-Cherkessia earlier this month, killing three officers to free a convicted prisoner, who was also shot dead in the Tuesday clash, said a spokesman for the republic's branch of the Investigative Committee.

Two more people were held in the North Caucasus over insurgency links this week.

A suspected rebel identified as Alim Shebzukhov was arrested in Kabardino-Balkaria, an unidentified local law enforcement source said Monday. In Chechnya, a 22-year-old local man, whose name was withheld, has confessed to providing food to a rebel group of Selim Bimurzayev in 2009, the Chechen government said on its web site.

Despite the incidents, commander-in-chief of the Interior Troops, Nikolai Rogozhkin, told a news conference in Moscow on Tuesday that the situation in the North Caucasus was "under control."

The number of troops in the region would not be increased, Rogozhkin was cited by Interfax as saying.

But he said a large-scale operation is on the way to detain or destroy Doku Umarov, an insurgent supremo who has claimed responsibility for the Domodedovo blast and promised more attacks this year.

Ingushetia leader Yunus-Bek Yevkurov said Tuesday that Umarov may be in the republic, hiding in a hard-to-reach mountain area near the region's border, Interfax reported.

Rogozhkin also said Ingush native Magomed Yevloyev, who carried out the Domodedovo attack, had possibly served in a Vladivostok unit of his force for three months, but the Interior Troops' press service later denied the report.

A video of Yevloyev in Domodedovo, shot by a surveillance camera, was released by the Lifenews.ru tabloid Tuesday.

Yevloyev was brought to the airport in a luxury Mercedes, which allowed the rebels to avoid police checks, the report said.

The bomber walked by a metal detector and spent 68 minutes walking around before the blast, Lifenews.ru said, adding that about 20 surveillance cameras recorded his movements.

The slim Yevloyev had a remarkable bulge in the area of his stomach, where the bomb was attached, but attracted no attention, the tabloid said.

Lifenews.ru also reiterated earlier reports that Yevloyev was heavily drugged with cocaine, marijuana, hash and other psychoactive substances, allegedly a regular practice for suicide bombers.

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