Russia Adopts Color-Coded Alert System as U.S. Drops It

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May 03, 2011

Russia is introducing a system of color-coded terror alerts similar to the one that the United States abandoned last month, with President Dmitry Medvedev signing the related bill into law on Tuesday, the Kremlin said.

The three-tier system includes blue for an increased level of danger, yellow for high and red for critical, according to a note attached to the bill, which is available on the State Duma's web site.

The alert level will be set by the president, who will also be allowed to introduce "additional security measures" to go with each color code. The bill does not spell out alert criteria or security measures, both of which are now to be defined by the president.

The vagueness on security measures has prompted fears that the legislation will serve as a pretext to suppress rights, similar to martial law. But the final text of the bill specifies that

anti-terrorism activity must not "restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens."

The system aims to help inform the public about threats and facilitate communication between security agencies, Federal Security Service deputy chief Yury Gorbunov said ahead of the first Duma reading of the draft in January.

But the law could also be seen as a subtle shift in the balance of power, because the president previously did not have the right to define anti-terrorism measures.

The 2006 counter-terrorism law makes "implementing measures to prevent terrorism" the job of the government, which has retained this responsibility but will now have to share it with the Kremlin.

The bill was introduced by the FSB in November in response to twin suicide bombings that killed 40 in the Moscow metro in March last year. It was approved by both houses of parliament last month.

The United States ditched its own five-tier color threat system, HSAS, in April as "ineffective," Itar-Tass noted Tuesday. The new system, NTAS, has only two levels, "elevated" and "imminent" threat, neither of which is color-coded.

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