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A Mole Poorly Disguised as a Sapsan Terrorist

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The Federal Security Service told Kommersant last week that it had prevented a major terrorist attack against the Sapsan bullet train between Moscow and St. Petersburg. According to the FSB, the attack was organized by Islam Khamuzhev, a native of Kabardino-Balkaria. Khamuzhev allegedly traveled to Moscow from Dagestan and at a mosque became acquainted with three Islamist radicals, two from Chechnya and one from Mordovia, the Volga region with an Islamic Tatar minority. The four supposedly began preparing for the terrorist attack by purchasing ammonium nitrate and scouting a location along the train route to plant the explosives.

Immediately afterward, Khamuzhev returned home and left Chechen Murad Edilbiyev, 22, in charge of everything. Edilbiyev moved the ammonium nitrate, wires and other components to his own home but, realizing that there was something strange about the whole affair, tried to throw away a bag full of explosive materials in a park. That was when agents detained him.

Although I am highly skeptical of the official version of these events, it would be wrong to say that I do not believe terrorist attacks are ever averted. For example, I believe that the suicide

bombing that Lithuanian citizen Egle Kusaite planned to carry out in Russia was averted, although she was ultimately arrested by Lithuanian, not Russian, security forces.

I also believe that Ruslan Ozniyev, who was arrested in 2009 while preparing a terrorist attack, really did attempt to carry it out. I believe it only because it was French intelligence that tipped off Russian agents after Ozniyev had spent time in France planning the attack.

But in those cases when attacks were planned on Russian soil, the FSB has had few successes. Take, for example, Mariam Sharipova, who blew herself up in the Moscow metro on March 29, 2010. Although she was the widow of a well-known Jordanian militant, her activities were not tracked by the FSB.

Or take Magomed Yevloyev, the Domodedovo Airport suicide bomber. Yevoloyev's in-laws took his daughter away from him, fearing that his affinity for terrorism would have a negative impact on her upbringing. This fact was also missed by the FSB.

Now, with the Sapsan incident, the FSB is trying to claim they averted another terrorist attack. But it is clear that there was a mole planted as a government informant. Most likely, the mole was Khamuzhev, the alleged mastermind of the planned attack on the Sapsan.

There are several reasons why I do not believe the FSB claims. First, Khamuzhev, an ethnic Kabardin, popped up out of nowhere in some small Dagestani town and said, "OK, guys, let's plot a bombing together." Why would Khamuzhev risk getting a bullet to the head for being an FSB spy? And why would he go to Dagestan at all when there are so many fellow Mujahedin at home in Kabardino-Balkaria? In any case, it makes no sense that he was sent to Moscow with instructions to "find some accomplices there and blow something up."

Second, Khamuzhev had no Moscow connections whatsoever. Real terrorists always rely on people very close to them. For example, Sharipova's brother escorted her to the metro.

Third, Khamuzhev went to a Moscow mosque to recruit the first three chance acquaintances he bumped into and convinced them to help stage a major terrorist attack. Does this sound like a real terrorist?

This is clearly a case of FSB entrapment and has nothing to do with foiling a terrorist attack.

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvy radio.

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