

Terror in Moscow

Fearing the wider consequences of a bomb attack on the Moscow metro.



TWO terrorist bombers on the Moscow metro killed at least 37 people and injured 102 in the morning rush hour on Monday March 29th. The first explosion, which killed 22 people and injured 12, struck just before 8am at the Lubyanka metro station, a few hundred feet from the Kremlin and next to the headquarters of the Federal Security Services, the successor to the KGB. The second bomb went off at Park Kultury, by the main circular road in central Moscow, killing at least 15.

The Russian security services said two female suicide bombers from the north Caucasus were responsible. The bombs might have been operated with the use of mobile phones, which work unhindered in the Moscow metro. Russia's emergency services appeared to be working in an orderly and co-ordinated way, cordoning off only the areas immediately affected by the explosions. Other metro lines remained open, with trains running regularly. There was a striking absence of panic in the capital, but no immediate sense of public numbness; ordinary commuters went on with their daily routines.

The first public figure to address the Russian people was Kirill, the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, who is extremely active in all state matters. Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's president, has not yet made a formal statement, but was shown by Russian television conducting a meeting with stony-faced officials from various ministries, and pledging to pursue terrorists "without hesitation and to the end". Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, who is travelling in Siberia, said he had interrupted his trip and pledged that terrorists would "be eliminated".

Russia has grown tragically familiar with terrorist attacks over the past two decades, during which it has fought two brutal wars in Chechnya, in the 1990s. But Moscow has not seen attacks such as these since August 2004, when a bomb on the Moscow metro killed nine people. Last November a bomb on the Nevsky express, which travels between Moscow and St Petersburg, killed 26 people and injured 100.

Chechnya itself has been relatively calm in recent years under the thumb of the local strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, installed by Mr Putin as Chechen president in 2007. But violence has spread to neighbouring republics, particularly Ingushetia and Dagestan, both of which have descended into a state resembling civil war. Yet although killings and explosions have become daily occurrences in these north Caucasian republics, in Moscow they are not considered to be attacks on Russia itself.

Mr Medvedev has described the situation in the north Caucasus as one of the greatest threats facing Russia. Yet corruption and brutality among Russia's security and military services have undoubtedly contributed to the growth of extremism in the region. In Ingushetia, for example, corrupt officials have paid off insurgents to keep their lucrative fiefs. Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, Ingushetia's president, who moved to root out corruption, was almost killed in a terrorist attack last June.

Russian state television channels were quick to draw parallels between the Moscow bombing and similar attacks in London in 2005. Terrorist assaults on soft targets are hard to prevent, but in Russia trust in the police and security services is particularly low. In the past few months corruption scandals and violent attacks by policemen on ordinary people have dominated the news. Several riot-police officers recently told an opposition journal, the New Times, that they were often called upon to raid businesses or guard criminal bosses.

Big terrorist attacks have in the past been used by the Kremlin to justify tightening its grip on power and curbing the opposition. The second war in Chechnya, in 2000, which helped to propel Mr Putin into his presidency, was accompanied by a move to bring Russian television under Kremlin control. In 2004, after the school siege in Beslan, in North Ossetia, Mr Putin scrapped regional elections. It would be unfortunate if the Kremlin, rather than overhauling its security agencies and reviewing its north Caucasus policy, opts to act in similar fashion now.

Fonte: The Economist. Disponível em: <www.economist.com>. Acesso em: 30 mar. 2010.

A utilização deste artigo é exclusiva para fins acadêmicos.