Evidence of FSB involvement in the Russian apartment bombings

There were many lines of evidence that a series of Russian apartment bombings have been committed by Russian State security services according to publications by a number of researchers, politicians and investigative journalists. The bombings were the largest series of coordinated terrorist attacks in Russia's history. The beginning of Second Chechen War made Prime Minister Vladimir Putin very popular, although he was previously unknown to the public, and helped him to win a landslide victory in the presidential elections on March 26, 2000. The following incidents were cited as evidence of FSB involvement.

FSB agents caught in the Russian city of Ryazan

Three FSB agents were caught a day after they planted a large bomb in the basement of an apartment complex in the town of Ryazan in September 22, during the series of bombings. That was last of the bombings. Russian Minister of Internal Affairs Rushailo and Vladimir Putin congratulated citizens with preventing the terrorism act (as they called it), but FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev declared that the incident was a training exercise later, when he had learned that the FSB agents from Moscow were caught by local FSB and police while trying to escape the city.

The Russian Deputy Prosecutor declared in 2002 that a comprehensive testing of the samples showed no traces of any explosives, and that sacks from Ryazan in fact contained only sugar. However, Yuri Tkachenko, the police explosives expert who defused the Ryazan bomb, insisted that it was real. Tkachenko said that the explosives, including a timer, a power source, and a detonator were genuine military equipment and obviously prepared by a professional. He also said that the gas analyzer that tested the vapors coming from the sacks unmistakably indicated the presence of RDX. Tkachenko said that it was out of the question that the analyzer could have malfunctioned, as the gas analyzer was of world class quality, costing $20,000, and was maintained by a specialist who worked according to a strict schedule, checking the analyzer after each use and making frequent prophylactic checks. Tkachenko pointed out that meticulous care in the handling of the gas analyzer was a necessity because the lives of the bomb squad experts depended on the reliability of their equipment. The police officers who answered the original call and discovered the bomb also insisted that it was obvious from its appearance that the substance in the bomb was not sugar.

Explosives controversies

Changing a story about the type of explosives

It was initially reported by the FSB that the explosives used by the terrorists was RDX (or "hexogen"). However, it was officially declared later that the explosive was not RDX, but a mixture of aluminum powder, niter (salt peter), sugar, and TNT prepared by the perpetrators in a concrete mixer at a fertilizer factory in Urus-Martan, Chechnya. RDX is produced in only one factory in Russia, in the city of Perm.

Incident in Russian Parliament

On September 13, just hours after the second explosion in Moscow, Russian Duma speaker Gennadiy Seleznyov of the Communist Party made a surprising announcement: "I have just received a report. According to information from Rostov-on-Don, an apartment building in the city of Volgodonsk was blown up last night". However, the bombing in Volgodonsk took place only three days later, on September 16. When the Volgodonsk bombing happened, Vladimir Zhirinovsky demanded an explanation in Duma, but Seleznev turned his microphone off.

Two years later, in March 2002, Seleznyov claimed in an interview that he had been referring to an unrelated hand grenade-based explosion, which did not kill anyone and did not destroy any buildings, and which indeed happened in Volgodonsk. It remains unclear why Seleznyov reported such an insignificant incident to the Russian Parliament and why he did not explain the misunderstanding to Zhirinovsky and other Duma members.

Alleged GRU involvement in Buynaksks bombings

In December 1999, journalist Robert Young Pelton interviewed senior lieutenant Aleksey Galkin, a GRU officer who was a prisoner of the Chechen rebels. Galkin confessed that the bombing in Buynaksk was organized by a GRU team under the general command of the head of the 14th section of the Central Intelligence Office, Lt. Gen. Kostechko, and GRU director Valentin Korabelnikov. Pelton describes the interview with Galkin in his book Three Worlds Gone Mad.

Galkin escaped from captivity at the beginning of 2000. After his escape he stated that Chechen rebels had tortured him to force statements he made to Pelton. His claims have been supported by medical expertise. The Duma, on a pro-Kremlin party line vote, voted to seal all materials related to the Ryazan incident for the next 75 years and forbade an investigation into what happened.

Obstruction of Kovalev commission

An independent public commission to investigate the bombings chaired by Duma deputy Sergei Kovalev, was rendered ineffective because of government refusal to respond to its inquiries. In 2002 and 2003 prominent members of the Kovalev commission underlined they had no information about the initiator of the bombings, but stressed, that the theory of the FSB involvement, published in the book of Litvinenko and Felshtinsky seems to be even more doubtful than the results of the official investigation. Two key members of the Kovalev Commission, Sergei Yushenkov and Yuri Shchekochikhin, both Duma members, have since died in apparent assassinations in April 2003 and July 2003 respectively. Another member of the commission, Otto Lasic, was assaulted in November 2003 and two years later on November 3 2005, died in hospital after a car accident.

Arrest of independent investigator Trepashkin

The commission of Sergei Kovalev asked lawyer Mikhail Trepashkin to investigate the case. Trepashkin found that the basement of one of the bombed buildings was rented by FSB officer Vladimir Romanovich and that the latter was witnessed by several people. However Trepashkin was unable to bring the evidence to the court because he was arrested in October 2003, allegedly for "disclosing state secrets", just a few days shortly before he was to make his findings public. He was sentenced by a military closed court to four years imprisonment. Amnesty International issued a...
statement that "there are serious grounds to believe that Mikhail Trepashkin was arrested and convicted under falsified criminal charges which may be politically motivated, in order to prevent him continuing his investigative and legal work related to the 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow and other cities". Romanovich subsequently died in a hit and run accident in Cyprus. According to Trepashkin, his supervisors and people from the FSB promised not to arrest him if he left the Kovalev commission and started working together with the FSB "against Alexander Litvinenko". Commission chairman Kovalev summarized their findings as follows: "What can I tell? We can prove only one thing: there was no any training exercise in the city of Ryazan. Authorities do not want to answer any questions..."

Publications about advanced planning of the bombings

On June 6 1999, three months before the bombings, Swedish journalist Jan Blomgren wrote in newspaper Svenska Dagbladet that one of options considered by the Kremlin leaders was "a series of terror bombings in Moscow that could be blamed on the Chechens."

On July 22, Moscow newspaper Moskovskaya Pravda published leaked documents about an operation "Storm in Moscow", which by organizing terrorist acts to cause chaos would bring about a state of emergency, thus saving the Yeltsin regime.

Russian Duma member Konstantin Borovoi said that he had been "warned by an agent of Russian military intelligence of a wave of terrorist bombings" prior to the blasts.<ref name="Advance"/>