

# AVIATIONsecurity

international

The Journal of Airport & Airline Security

OCTOBER 2004 : Volume 10 Issue 5



## **Chechen Black Widows:**

Russian airliners bombed by  
female suicide terrorists

**Zvonko & Julienne Basic:**  
an ASI exclusive interview

**September 11 2004 &  
US Aviation Security:**  
still a work in progress

**Biometrics and Airport Security:**  
an American perspective

**Counterfeit Aircraft Parts:**  
a threat to airworthiness

ISSN 352-0148 USPS 010-807





# BLACK WIDOWS STRIKE THE RUSSIAN AIRWAYS

As the news filtered through that two Russian airliners had crashed within minutes of each other on the night of 24 August, few security professionals doubted that Chechen terrorists were behind the disasters.

Suicidal terrorism had been embraced as a modus operandi by Chechen terrorists for a number of years, getting limited international coverage by the western media. Indeed, the coverage of the air disasters had scant international appeal for the press given the absence of spectacular images à la September 11 and the mistakenly assumed tenuous connection with the global war on terrorism. It took a mass-hostage taking scenario at a school in Beslan, culminating in the deaths of hundreds of children and their parents, to really titillate international sensitivity.

However, the lessons the rest of the world can learn from the two acts of aerial sabotage are probably greater than those we can extract from the Beslan tragedy, aside from the obvious demonstration of the depths to which terrorism can stoop.

When Aminat Nagayeva and Satsita Dzhebirkhanova detonated their respective devices in the rear toilets of the aircraft they had boarded at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport, they demonstrated a number of the latent shortcomings of our global approach to aviation security rather than specific lapses at one Russian airport.

Domodedovo airport is one of three main passenger airports serving Moscow and has been gaining in popularity with international carriers. (British

Airways and Swiss International moved their operations there in recent years from the more famous Sheremetyevo.) Privately owned by the East Line Group, Domodedovo has invested heavily in its security infrastructure. It recently installed a biometric system as part of its access control system and, over the past two years it has spent millions of dollars upgrading its passenger screening technology. However, such technologies have extremely limited capability of detecting a suicide bomber that is prepared to carry an improvised explosive device on (or in) their person. In this respect, Domodedovo is no different to practically every other airport in the world.

Furthermore, overseas inspection teams, including one carried out by the TSA in June 2004, found little to criticise in Domodedovo.

It would seem that bribery, corruption and what can at best be described as complete professional negligence played a key role in ensuring the "success" of the mission. The initial report into the disaster indicates that the two women arrived in Moscow at 1945hrs on a flight from Makhachkala, which is located near to Chechnya, along with two other "colleagues".

Airport police stopped the women and pulled them aside for further inspection, demonstrating the advantages of profiling techniques, even on racial grounds, over technology. Their documents were handed over to a (Airport Police) Captain Mikhail Artamonov who was supposed to instigate a baggage, body and background check on them. Seemingly, he released them without further inspection

and they proceeded to buy tickets, from a ticket tout, for flights later that evening. Artamonov was later arrested.

The ticket tout, later named as Armen Arutyunov, was paid 5,000 roubles (approx. US\$170) by the women. The tout, in turn, then paid 1,000 roubles to a Sibir Airlines employee, Nikolai Korenkov, to alter Dzerbirkhanova's ticket from a flight on the 25th to a flight the same evening; she managed to check-in only two minutes before the flight closed. Arutyunov also paid a bribe to get Nagayeva onto the Volga-Aviaexpress flight. Bribes *may* have also been paid to by-pass security checks. Given the rate of pay for security guards in the vast majority of airports around the world, bribery remains a fundamental problem whatever the good intentions of Annex 17 and each country's national aviation security programme. Domodedovo, again, is not alone.

Given the above culture that enables terrorists to permeate our security system there is little that the airlines could have done to mitigate the risk once the aircraft were airborne. Sky marshals may have been able to identify the women by behavioural analysis in flight, yet it is a big "may" as it would have depended on their line of sight, training and capability. We know Dzerbirkhanova was seated in 19F, a window seat on the Tu-154, probably out of sight of most others on board with the exception of those in the same row.

Her walk to the rear toilets was short and, once inside, she had all the time she needed to detonate her device. Unlike Richard Reid, no passengers and crew would be on hand to prevent her actions. On a Tu-134, at almost exactly



the same time (such being the nature of so many terrorist atrocities of the al-Qa'eda ilk), Nagayeva commenced her death march down the aisle towards the rear toilets where, likewise, she was secure from intervention.

Crew security training may have helped. Awareness of the threat certainly lead crewmembers demanding that two other Chechen women, who boarded a flight bound for Moscow from the Egyptian resort of Sharm-el-Sheikh on 1 September, being off-loaded. Their suspicions were raised as the women allegedly boarded at the last minute and both immediately went to the toilets.

Russian media reports have indicated that there is intelligence indicating that a group of 20 Chechen women have been trained as suicide bombers. There is nothing to indicate that such potential attacks be limited to the Russian stage.

The women have been labelled "black widows" playing on the deadliness of the spider of their namesake and the fact that most have lost menfolk in the Chechen conflict.

The investigation focussed on Dzhebirkhanova and Nagayeva as they had both bought their tickets at the last minute, neither body had been claimed by relatives and were Chechen. As the investigation progressed it emerged that the damage to their bodies indicated that they had been at the centre of the hexogen-powered explosions.

It would seem that they became "black widows", despite not having any known links to terrorist cells, a warning to those who would rely solely on watch-lists (including Cat Stevens). According to Izvestia, Nagayeva's brother disappeared in Chechnya three years ago and is presumed dead - she, herself, was single. One of Dzhebirkhanova's brothers had seemingly been killed in 1998, having been an Islamic court judge under Chechen separatist President Aslan Maskhadov; Dzhebirkhanova was divorced.

Izvestia reported that the two bombers lived in the same apartment in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. They were last seen two days before the bombing when they took a bus from the town of Khasavyurt, in Dagestan, probably to Baku in Azerbaijan.

It was a journey they often made as they bought goods to sell at their market stall in Grozny. Joining them on the bus was Nagayeva's sister, Rosa, and a friend, Mariyam Taburova. (These two women may well have been the suicide bombers responsible for the explosion near Rizhskaya Metro Station on 31 August that killed eight people). According to Nagayeva's mother, her daughter had never been on an aeroplane before...

Whilst the world's media quickly consigned 24 August 2004 to the history books and resumed its coverage on 11 September 2001 memorial services, it is incumbent upon us within the industry not to view this event as an aside. There are many lessons to be learned...and many more black widows lurking in the shadows. ■

## CARGO PROTECTION BEGINS WITH DETECTION



E 3500 & E 3200 Chemilux  
Hand-held and E 5000 GC/IMS  
Console Explosives Detectors

EVD-3000 & EVD-2500  
Explosives Detectors



N2000 Hand-held  
Drug Detector



Fully Automatic V 6000  
Vehicle & Truck Bomb & Drug  
Detection System

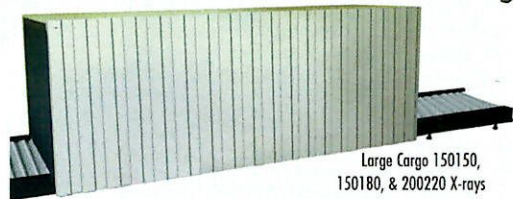
6040, 400+, 5333,  
7555 or 4025 Parcel X-rays



Checked Bag & Cargo 100100T,  
10080T & 100100B X-rays



CheckGate®  
MZ8, 8000 or 9000  
(70cm W x 202cm H)



Large Cargo 150150,  
150180, & 200220 X-rays

### X-RAY, TRACE, EXPLOSIVES, DRUGS, AND WEAPONS DETECTION

Control Screening engineers, crafts and supports the broadest line of X-ray, explosives, narcotics and weapons checkpoint screening systems. A former division of Philips, together with Scintrex Trace, CPAD and Federal Labs, we offer greater in-depth production and engineering experience, training and support, and the most advanced technologies, including TIP, Multi-Energy, Image Recall, RealClear, Help+, Cargo Systems, Mail Scanners, and features like Help, autoMatalert, autoScale, autoTracking, autoSensing and autoCal. Ask about our latest E5000 desktop GC/IMS trace detector, and our latest portables, the EVD2500, the E3200 and high-end E3500, or visit us now at [www.controlscreening.com](http://www.controlscreening.com)

Tel: + (973) 276-6161 • Fax: + (973) 276-6162  
[leads@controlscreening.com](mailto:leads@controlscreening.com)  
[www.controlscreening.com](http://www.controlscreening.com)

Integrators & Agents Protected



Celebrating 65 years of excellence in design & support

# AUTOCLEAR

[ControlScreening.com](http://ControlScreening.com)

autoClear • Scintrex • Federal Labs • CheckGate • Dynavision • CPAD • RealClear  
U.S. Canada Europe Dubai Latin America Hong Kong Singapore

Head Offices: 2 Gardner Road, Fairfield, New Jersey 07004 USA