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The Name Game as Blame Game: The Domodedovo Terrorist Bombing

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Title: The Name Game as Blame Game: The Domodedovo Terrorist Bombing

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Abstract: The author discusses the relevance of blame in the context of terrorism.

Rhythm and blues singer Shirley Ellis co-wrote and recorded The Name Game in 1964. By 1965 it had risen to #3 on the Billboard Hot 100. Then and now, many of the lyrics seem nonsensical yet have meaning enough to help generate the record's huge number of purchases. [Whether there is meaning in no meaning and whether no meaning influences behavior were important to German philosopher Martin Heidegger among others, but will take us too far afield to explore in this article.] Allegedly, the lyrics are based on a children's game involving the addition of consonants and syllables to common first names forming rhythmic, rhyming chants. The Name Game also has been covered by other musical entertainers as diverse as Divine (1980) and Laura Branigan (1987), placed on soundtracks with or without music in films such as Hudson Hawk (1991), Bewitched (2005), and The Money Pit (1986), and used in a commercial for Little Caesar's Pizza. It is noteworthy that The Name Game becomes blame game as an example of the vacuity of mass culture, the possibility of not playing the game error-free, and the anticipatory titillation and delectable pleasure of using common first names that will form obscene words when subjected to the addition of consonants and syllables.

Naming also leads to blaming in the aftermath of the January 24th bombing at Moscow's Domodedovo airport in which over 30 people have been killed and over 130 injured. The name of bombing has led to the game of blaming and attempts at avoiding blame. Translations from the verbal statements of Russian President Dmitry Medvedev suggest that "... there were clear security breaches...because obviously there have been lapses..." [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12272392>] and "...What happened shows that obviously there were violations in guaranteeing security. And it should be answered for by those who make decisions there and by the management of the airport..." [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/25/moscow-airport-bomb-briton-named>]. Translations from verbal statements of airport security officials suggest that "...In response to some publications in the media stating that not every entrance control group was equipped with the required means of passenger security control, that some of them were out of order, Domodedovo airport may officially declare that absolutely all entrance control groups had been fitted with metal detectors for passenger checking and introsopes for baggage screening. The equipment has been duly certified and in a working order..." [http://www.domodedovo.ru/en/main/news/press_rel/?ID=2988].

So what's the winning hand in this game? Who's to blame?

One approach suggests that there's plenty of blame to spread around. If intelligence on the threat could have been collected, analyzed, and transmitted in a timely and secure fashion to security officials, but wasn't, then blame lies with the intelligence community. If appropriate intelligence reached the security authorities but was not acted on appropriately, then Medvedev may be right and these authorities merit the blame. If both the intelligence community and airport authorities did their job, the blame may lie with others responsible for informing the general public via security advisories or what has passed for such in Russia in general and Moscow in particular. [If there truly have been no public security advisories, the political authorities who made this decision may be to blame. Also, it is important to

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note that the Russians already are making changes in security advisory process in reaction to the bombing, and the United States Department of Homeland Security announced significant changes to its security advisory process a few days after the bombing but not reactive to it. Changes had been planned well before the bombing.]

There are yet three other possibilities related to blame. Russian military, paramilitary, law enforcement, and intelligence forces may have been inadequate in identifying, apprehending, and neutralizing human threats to the airport, well before the latter came anywhere close to Domodedovo. In addition, Russian “soft power”—economic, social, and cultural intervention capabilities to decrease the number of people who desire to engage in or support terrorism—may have been inadequate. Finally, there’s the conspiracy theory explanation that Russian political, intelligence and security authorities might have planned and implemented the bombing. [This sort of explanation has often come up in mass murders as diverse as those in Russia, Iraq, and 9/11.] If conspiracy theory turns out to be the “truth” at Domodedovo, medals could be in order for some Russian authorities, blame for others.

Such a welter of explanatory pathways frequently serves as a protection for those who may have failed in offensive and defensive intelligence and security and for those who perpetrated the act—friend or foe.

However, there’s also a second approach which does not attribute blame, save to human nature, some sort of Original Sin, or the Gods in the guide of Fate. In this approach, the bombing may not have been preventable due to human limits of knowledge and predictability that cannot be breached. And it is hubris to suggest otherwise, even if it makes good politics.

So the name game as blame game may leave us without a clear winner. The blood may be on no one’s hands save the perpetrators. And the perpetrators may be willing to explain how their blood is not blood at all but, instead, Justice, the Right, the Good—at which point they’re also not to blame. In addition, how we blame and act on the blame will have an effect on future terrorism. But make no doubt about it. Whether the blood of the lamb or the lion, death is apparent to all.

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