

## **GIDUCK, JOHN. (2005). TERROR AT BESLAN: A RUSSIAN TRAGEDY WITH LESSONS FOR AMERICA'S SCHOOL. ARCHANGEL GROUP, INC.**

**Rena Harris**

Does your school have a protocol for a violent attack? Could another Beslan occur? If so, what lessons can we learn from the tragedy of September, 2004? John Giduck asserts that the terrorist threat to U.S. schools is highly feasible, and he urges schools to be prepared for the eventuality of terrorist attacks and uses the Beslan tragedy to spur schools into action. Giduck's training is in Military Intelligence, and he was based in Russia. At the onset of the Beslan attack, he traveled to the site. He presents a first-hand account to the tragedy, but he also elaborates on the history of conflict between Chechnya and Russia. Finally, he offers some pointers for school preparedness and security procedures. He advises U.S. citizenry to be on guard for terrorists and not be "lulled into complacency".

Giduck explains that the attackers chose the first day of school for their attack, a day of family celebration known as the "Day of Knowledge." Family members were on hand, an audience for students who take part in the festivities. It was not yet 8:00am when a truck carrying 30 heavily armed Chechen men and 2 women arrived at the school. Terrorist training exercises are such a regular activity that the bystanders did not react and stood by as the Chechens herded 1100 hostages to the school courtyard. Caught between the tactics of surprise and diversion, the crowd could do little when confronted with the dreadful reality.

The assault ended after 62 hours when the Russian military ignited a fire in the roof of the building where the wounded were housed. Tragically, the military lacked adequate rescue plans including a lack of fire trucks and ambulances. At the Beslan Middle School Number One, there were 330 dead, including 172 children, while another 700 individuals were wounded.

Provocative descriptions of Chechen and Islamic fighters pepper the text, e.g. terrorists are on a "worldwide terror spree." It is important to note that Giduck is employed by Archangel Group (also the publisher), a consulting firm with contracts with the U.S. military and law enforcement agencies to provide anti-terrorism instruction to Green Berets, SWAT teams, security guards and law enforcement personnel, and therefore his motivation is suspect. Indeed, the book reads like an advertising brochure, and in this case, the product is the author's anti-terrorist consulting prowess. In an unintentionally humorous moment, Giduck explains that he was taken aback when Tom Ridge, the head of Homeland Security, refused a consultation with the author on the subject of Beslan. The book is obscure, most likely because of the author's bias—he offers few lessons from Beslan and instead, attempts to gel grounded feelings of concern into swelling chunks of anxiety.

When Giduck restrains himself, he offers a general to-do list in the event of an assault:

- \*Familiarize personnel with website that contains information on all types of emergencies, including natural disasters and violence in schools: [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- \*Assess communication stock: purchase cheap multiple-unit systems
- \*Outfit the school with first aid kits, including Super Glue (for cuts), tampons (to manage blood flow) and small needle-nose pliers (clamps and misc. uses)
- \*Gather drawings, blueprints schematics, floor plans and walk-through videotapes of buildings
- \*Stockpile water
- \*Prepare to deal (along with law enforcement professionals) with parents and relatives
- \*Prepare to deal with news media, crowds, etc.

Many of the items on his list appear reasonable and could support safety in the event of a natural catastrophe as well. The web site offers solid advice. Yet, from Beslan Middle School Number One we learn that preparation for the unimaginable is an unwieldy task. From Beslan, we learn that attackers infiltrated the school on earlier occasions and hid weapons to be obtained later during the attack. The aggressors were merciless, vicious, and committed to the carnage. Officials had advance, but ambiguous, notice of the attack and provided some additional security. Residents were exposed to training sessions because of previous terrorist attacks. The confrontation occurred in broad daylight in the midst of large crowds. The Russian military intervened with weaponry and started a devastating fire. Even the most anxious and best-prepared school security team could not anticipate the events as they unfolded.

Yes, there are lessons to be learned from Beslan, but let us hope that Giduck's warnings of future attacks on schools are never

materialized. Fear is a less desirable motivator than need; the ability to think rationally dissipates with fear. Decisions involving school preparedness should be considered thoughtfully, in terms of both the actual threat and the protective response.

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