

Russian officials deceived their people

09/08/04

To the Editor:

The Russians now have their own September horror.

What we are learning in the wake of the massacre of innocent school children is that the Russian leadership did not immediately disclose to its own citizens the magnitude of the hostage situation. ("Russian officials: We lied about the standoff's enormity," Sept. 6)

This seems all too familiar. Recall that immediately after the recent Spanish train bombings, the government blamed the terrorism on separatists rather than Islamic militants who were the real culprits. The deceit of the leadership influenced the subsequent elections far more than the barbarous attack.

Closer to home we are learning through the 9/11 Commission that an admission of government accountability at the highest levels is still lacking. The current and previous administrations have sought to avoid more blame than they have accepted. We know more could have been done to prevent the deaths of thousands of Americans.

Without question, those who attacked us are ultimately responsible. Yet, we have not yet come to grips with the fact that there is a natural tendency of leaders worldwide to deflect criticism from themselves for their failures to detect and destroy such monstrous threats.

We must learn from the Russian television commentator Sergei Brilyov who said of his own government: "At such moments, society needs the truth."

To begin the process of avoiding such atrocities in the future we must demand candor from world leaders whether they are in Moscow or in Washington.

David Raybin