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Journalist Anna Politkovskaya



(U) Biography

(U) **Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya** was born in New York City on 30 August 1958. She was the daughter of Soviet Ukrainian diplomats posted at the United Nations. She studied journalism at Moscow State University and began her career with the newspaper *Izvestiya*. She became a prominent Russian journalist and was noted for her critical opposition to Putin's administration and her reporting on the war in Chechnya. She had received death threats for years, including one from a police officer which forced her to flee to Vienna in 2001, as well as an attempted poisoning on an aircraft while flying to Beslan to help in hostage negotiations.

- (TS//SI//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR, NZL) Russian Federal Intelligence Services (probably FSB) are known to have targeted the webmail account of the murdered Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya. On 5 December 2005, RFIS initiated an attack against the account `annapolitkovskaia@US Provider1`, by deploying malicious software which is not available in the public domain. It is not known whether this attack is in any way associated with the death of the journalist.^[1]

(U) Murder

(C//NF) Politkovskaya was assassinated in Moscow on 7 October 2006, probably in relation to her professional activities. She was found shot twice in the head in an elevator in her apartment building. Authorities under the personal supervision of the Russian Prosecutor General are investigating what is believed to be a contract killing, and the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* has announced a reward of 25 million rubles (about \$930,000) for information that helps the investigation. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 12 journalists have been killed in Russia in contract-style murders since 2000, 43 since 1992.

- The assassination of Alexander Litvinenko, a former Federal Security Service colonel, who died in a London hospital on 23 November 2006, may be related to Anna Politkovskaya's case. Officials from Scotland Yard announced Litvinenko was poisoned shortly after having lunch with a man who gave him documents related to her killing, according to press reports.^[2]

(U) Reaction

(C//NF) President Putin on Tuesday, 10 October 2006, publicly denounced the murder, ruling out the possibility that government officials, including Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, could have been behind the murder.^[3] Officials and pro-Kremlin media suggested the murder was planned by foes outside the country, some even hinting that it was part of a broader plot to discredit Russia.^{[4] [5] [6]} In contrast, most nonofficial sources emphasized that Politkovskaya was a vociferous opponent of government policies in Chechnya and was sure to have accumulated enemies in and outside of government. Reports listed several suspects, including Chechen Prime Minister Kadyrov, Russian security services, and Russian nationalists.^{[7] [8]}

(C//NF) Western media and Western political circles treated Politkovskaya's death as another sign of Russia's turn towards authoritarianism. On Putin's official visit to Germany October 10-11, German politicians and international media repeatedly brought up Politkovskaya's death.^[9] Putin coolly responded that Politkovskaya had minimal impact on Russian political life.^[9]

(U) Investigation

(U//FOUO) Most professional contract killings in Russia are never solved. The triggermen are sometimes prosecuted, but the person who ordered the hit is rarely uncovered or prosecuted. However, on 27 August 2007, Russian Prosecutor-General Yuriy Chayka reported ten arrests were made as a result of the Politkovskaya murder investigation, including a Major in the police force, three former members of the police force, and a Lieutenant Colonel serving in the FSB, along with three Chechens.

(U) Russia's chief prosecutor announced on 27 August 2007 that 10 people involved in the killing of journalist Anna Politkovskaya had been arrested, alleging that those behind the murder of the well-known Kremlin critic included members of Russia's police and security services.^[10] Since then, at least two suspects have been released on lack of evidence.

(U) According to lead investigator Petros Garibyan comments on 08 October 2007, the actual killer has been identified. However, it is not known if the individual has been charged with a related crime, if the individual is already in custody, or why the individual has not been charged^[11]

(U) A Moscow Interfax report of 28 March 2008 quoted a representative of the Russian Prosecutor General's office stating again that "the direct murderer" of Politkovskaya had been identified, and that "Every measure to search for and apprehend this person is being taken."^[12]

(U) On 31 May 2011, a Chechen by the name of Rustam Makhmudov was detained for the murder and is believed to have been the trigger man.^[13]

(U) Trial

On February 19th, 2009, the three people accused of helping murder the journalist were not guilty. Brothers Dzhabrail and Ibragim Makhmudov were cleared of acting as accomplices in the murder and former police officer Sergei Khadzhikurbanov was cleared of organizing the crime. [14]

(U) Professional Work

(U) Books authored by Politkovskaya include:

- (U) "A Russian Diary," 2007 (published posthumously; not published in Russia)
- (U) "Life in a Failing Democracy," 2006
- (U) "Putin's Russia," 2004.
- (U) "A Dirty War: A Russian Reporter in Chechnya," 2003

(U) In "Stalinism Forever," an editorial in the 1 April 2006 issue of the Washington Post, Politkovskaya wrote, "We are using Stalin's methods again, this time to fight terrorism. I am writing for this American newspaper on a subject that one can no longer write about in Russia--*islamskiy terrorism*, or Islamic terrorism cases."

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