The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Kremlin Needs to Find Killers Of Journalists

By William Dunkerley

April 04, 2011




Russia and Ukraine have something quite macabre in common: Both countries have former presidents who have been linked to the deaths of journalists. Last month, former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma was charged in the murder of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has been accused by critics of involvement in the deaths of several Russian journalists.

Suspicions run high that some journalists were killed because of their opposition to the ruling regimes. But some say these allegations have been trumped up by the political enemies of the former presidents.

Russia is known to have a high rate of journalist murders. International media have persistently implicated Putin in the deaths. The murder of Anna Politkovskaya, an investigative reporter who covered the Chechen conflict, is a notable case. She was shot in her own apartment building by a gunman in 2006.

That year also saw the high-profile London poisoning death of Alexander Litvinenko. He is known for his intelligence background but also was a journalist with the Chechen Press State News Agency. The masterminds of both killings remain unknown, but Putin's critics have pointed a finger at him.

So what's behind all the journalist murders? Monterey Institute professor Gordon Hahn explains, "Almost all contract murders in Russia — including journalists — are ordered by criminal groups or corrupt officials whose operations are exposed by journalists."

Perhaps the presidential administration's clearest failure lies in the absence of convictions for these crimes. This failure to convict is feeding the popular opinion that the Kremlin is behind the murders. That diverts focus from a very serious problem — that so many journalist murders have gone unpunished.

Now is the time for President Dmitry Medvedev to directly address the problem of the killing of journalists. The real killers and masterminds must be apprehended and brought to justice.

William Dunkerley is a media business analyst and consultant specializing in Russia and the former Soviet Union.

*The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.*

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/04/04/kremlin-needs-to-find-killers-of-journalists-a6083