

Politkovskaya's Suspected Killer Held

By [Alexandra Odynova](#)

May 31, 2011



Politkovskaya is still honored on the anniversary of her death every October outside her apartment building. **Igor Tabakov**

The Chechen man accused of trailing reporter Anna Politkovskaya into her apartment building late one Saturday afternoon and shooting her in the head as she got onto the elevator is in Moscow custody after evading authorities for nearly five years, investigators [said](#) Tuesday.

The suspect, Rustam Makhmudov, 37, who freely traveled to Belgium and back to Russia despite being on an international wanted list, was arrested by FSB and military forces in his family home in the Chechen village of Achkhei-Martan, a Chechen police spokesman said by telephone.

Makhmudov was "tired of being on the run" and had intended to turn himself in but was arrested before he could follow through on his plans, said Murad Musayev, a lawyer for Makhmudov's brother Dzhabrail, who together with a third brother was accused of assisting Rustam in the killing, Interfax reported.

The mastermind of Politkovskaya's murder remains unknown, and her family expressed doubt that the arrest of the suspected triggerman would shed any light on his identity.

Politkovskaya's brother, Ilya, told Interfax that he believed that the person who shot his sister was a "low-level criminal" who "doesn't know who ordered the killing."

Politkovskaya, 48, an investigative journalist for Novaya Gazeta who rankled both the Kremlin and Chechen authorities with her critical reports on human rights abuses, was killed as she returned to her central Moscow apartment from a grocery shopping trip on Oct. 7, 2006.

Investigators say the killing was a contract hit carried out by Rustam Makhmudov with the assistance of his brothers Dzhabrail and Ibragim. Former police officer Sergei Khadzhikurbanov has been accused of being their contact with the organizer of the killing.

A jury acquitted Dzhabrail and Ibragim Makhmudov and Khadzhikurbanov in a 2009 trial that the Supreme Court later overturned. A new investigation is ongoing. Khadzhikurbanov was convicted of extortion and jailed in an unrelated case last year.

Details of Rustam Makhmudov's arrest remained murky Tuesday. The Investigative Committee said Makhmudov moved to Belgium and spent some time there after Politkovskaya's death. But he returned to Russia after local law enforcement agencies began to search for him at the request of the Investigative Committee, it said in a statement on its web site.

The statement did not elaborate on how he managed to re-enter Russia. After his arrest in Chechnya, he was transported to Moscow to face murder charges, it said.

Makhmudov hope that his innocence will be proved when investigators compare his DNA with samples found at the crime scene, said Musayev, the lawyer. The Investigative Committee made no mention of a DNA test, saying only that the inquiry was ongoing.

Novaya Gazeta deputy editor Sergei Sokolov cautiously welcomed Makhmudov's arrest as a "certain development in the case" but said many questions remained.

"I'm very interested to know how he managed to leave Russia and come back from his journey while his name was on the international wanted list," Sokolov said by telephone.

Novaya Gazeta, which is conducting an independent inquiry into Politkovskaya's murder, has implicated the Federal Security Service in the case, saying Makhmudov was actually once detained for questioning in Russia but then released, apparently on orders from above.

Anna Statvitskaya, a lawyer for Politkovskaya's two children, told The Moscow Times that she feared Makhmudov would be tried and convicted as a scapegoat while further investigation into identifying the mastermind would be abandoned.

Reporters Without Borders speculated after the Makhmudovs' trial that Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov might have been behind the killing.

Politkovskaya was not the only critic of Kadyrov to be killed by unidentified assailants. Human

rights activist Natalya Estemirova was kidnapped in Grozny on July 15, 2009, and her body was found with bullet wounds later that day alongside a road in Ingushetia.

Kadyrov has denied involvement in both cases and even sued Estemirova's colleagues over their allegations. A defamation trial is ongoing.

Then-President Vladimir Putin, a frequent target of Politkovskaya's criticism, played down the significance of her work in his first public comments made three days after death. "She had minimal influence on political life in Russia," he told reporters during a trip to Germany.

The unsolved killing of Politkovskaya remains a perpetual source of criticism of the Kremlin by international human rights activists, who accuse Russian authorities of failing to protect rights and uphold justice in the country.

The authorities seem to have put renewed vigor into settling several cases that have received international criticism, with a Moscow court convicting two nationalists in the 2008 shooting of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Novaya Gazeta freelancer Anastasia Baburova last month.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/05/31/politkovskayas-suspected-killer-held-a7330>