

Foiled Effort to Kill Putin Revealed

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A handout photo distributed Monday shows the apartment where two people were detained and one killed after an explosion in Odessa on Jan. 4.

CORRECTION APPENDED

Ukrainian and Russian security officials announced Monday that they had uncovered a plot by a Chechen-connected terrorist group to assassinate Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

News of the plot was broken by the state-owned Channel One television station, whose report said people connected with Chechen terrorist leader Doku Umarov had been arrested in Odessa, Ukraine.

A Federal Security Service representative said terrorists working under Umarov were planning to kill Putin using a mine after the March 4 presidential election.

Although the existence of the plot was indirectly confirmed by Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, analysts said the news, which broke just days before the election, is intended to boost

Putin's popularity.

Putin is considered a shoo-in to win the election and return to the presidency.

The Channel One report shows police interrogating a person identified as Ilya Pyanzin, 28.

Pyanzin said he was instructed to carry out a terrorist act by representatives of Umarov, a notorious Chechen terrorist who has claimed responsibility for several bombings in Moscow.

"They told us to go to Odessa first, learn how to make a bomb and then in Moscow to conduct diversions on economic targets," said Pyanzin, adding that his group's final plan was to assassinate Putin.

Pyanzin was reported to be a citizen of Kazakhstan after his arrest in January.

He was arrested as a suspect in the Jan. 4 blast at an Odessa apartment building. He was wounded during the incident, which Ukrainian police said was an explosion of propane.

Explosives were later found inside the apartment, Ukrainian police said.

Another suspect, Ruslan Madayev, 26, was killed in the blast.

Channel One reported that Ukrainian security services also detained the third member of the group, Adam Osmayev, who started to cooperate with investigators out of fear of being extradited to Russia.

The report said a video showing Putin's motorcade shot from various distances was found on Osmayev's laptop.

A Federal Security Service official said Osmayev showed authorities the ammunition storage area near Kutuzovsky Bridge that was intended to be used in the plot.

Channel One reported that Russian security officials have cleared the storage site. Kutuzovsky Bridge connects with the major highways and is used extensively by governmental officials.

Osmayev told Channel One in an interview from his cell that he became interested in terrorist activity while studying economics at England's University of Buckingham and coming in contact with rebel leaders living in exile in Britain.

Ukrainian Security Service spokeswoman Marina Ostapenko confirmed that Russian citizens detained by Ukrainian security services intended to assassinate Putin, Interfax reported.

Her statement was confirmed by the Federal Guard Service, the agency that protects high-ranking officials.

Nikolai Kovalyov, a former head of the Federal Security Service, described the plot as an "overt terrorist act" and called the suspects' level of preparedness "high."

Experts familiar with presidential security told The Moscow Times that it is hard to identify the car in which the prime minister is traveling because his entourage often consists of similar-looking cars.

Kovalyov said the suspects intended to destabilize the situation in the country on the eve of the presidential election.

He referred to an earlier statement by Umarov in which the terrorist leader urged his followers not to attack Russian citizens because they were waging large-scale protests against Putin.

"He is satisfied with the mass protest actions, but he is not satisfied with the [likely outcome of the] presidential election and the choice for stability," Kovalyov said, Itar-Tass reported Monday.

A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov told reporters Monday that he believes that the government was prepared for such a terrorist act.

Mironov added that he based his opinion on his experience as a former Security Council member. He said information might have been saved by security officials for use during the campaign.

But Pavel Salin, a senior expert at the Center for Current Politics, a Kremlin-leaning think tank, said an attempt to make Putin a terrorist target was possibly an invention of his campaign team.

"During the election month, Putin's spin doctors do almost anything to boost his rating," Salin said. "Of course, terrorists from the Caucasus might nurse plans to kill Putin or Medvedev, but it is one thing to have desires, another to actually be able to achieve it."

Andrei Soldatov, a security expert at the Agentura.ru think tank, said the news was not first announced by the Federal Security Service but by Putin's spokesman and reported by Channel One.

"For me, that is an indication that a decision to announce it was made on a political level," Soldatov said.

Channel One deputy head Kirill Kleimenov said Monday that his channel stands by the authenticity of its report and that reporters were provided with the information by the FSB 10 days ago.

Interestingly, the plot was not mentioned on the 7 p.m. newscast on Gazprom-controlled channel NTV.

Reports of the latest plot recall similar stories of an attempt on Putin's life in March 2008, when his protege Dmitry Medvedev was running for president with his blessing.

Those allegations, first reported by sensationalist tabloid Tvoi Dyen, indicated that a Tajik citizen planned to kill Putin during a post-election concert on Red Square.

Security officials, however, denied the existence of that plot, saying the detainees belonged to a criminal gang.

Various Soviet leaders, including Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev, survived

assassination attempts.

The attempt to kill Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin by radical Socialist Fanni Caplan in 1918 was partly successful, since Lenin was wounded and died six years later.

Four citizens of Uzbekistan were detained near the White House on Sunday, telling police afterward that they were seeking a meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev, Izvestia reported.

The group, presumably a family because they all have the last name of Rasulovy, hoped Putin and Medvedev would help them resolve a financial problem, police said.

The group told police that Uzbek authorities had not responded to their requests for assistance.

After questioning, police told them to speak with the Uzbek Embassy and released them.

Correction: An earlier version of this story stated that Channel One deputy head Kirill Kleimenov said RIA-Novosti provided Channel One reporters with information about the Putin plot 10 days before Monday's broadcast. Kleimenov in fact said the information had been provided by the Federal Security Service.

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