

Georgian Organized Clashes, Investigators Say

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Investigators on Thursday blamed Givi Targamadze, former head of the Georgian parliament's defense committee, with orchestrating the May 6 violence on Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

On the eve of the next major anti-government protest, investigators announced that they had evidence that a Georgian politician helped organize violent clashes at a May 6 protest in Moscow.

Givi Targamadze, a close ally of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, "managed" opposition leaders responsible for the so-called "March of Millions" on May 6 that ended in bloody clashes with police and hundreds of detentions, investigators said in a statement Thursday.

They also said the evidence confirmed that Targamadze had played a "concrete role" in organizing "riots" at the May 6 event.

The new evidence could mean a harsher charge against opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov and his jailed associates Leonid Razvozzhayev and Konstantin Lebedev, opening the door for investigators to accuse the three of organizing mass riots, which carries a sentence of up to ten years in prison. The three activists are currently charged with a lesser, related offense.

Udaltsov and Razvozzhayev have said they have no relationship with Targamadze, and Targamadze has said the same about them.

The Kremlin has long accused the opposition of being funded by foreigners, but the statement by investigators marked a rare instance of the authorities naming a specific foreign national as an organizer of anti-Kremlin activities.

In his state-of-the-nation address on Thursday, President Vladimir Putin declared that foreign "interference" in Russian internal politics was "unacceptable," and that anyone whose political actions are funded from abroad and who likely serves foreign national interests cannot be a politician in Russia.

Investigators also repeated an earlier allegation that they had evidence that Targamadze financed Russian opposition activities, including a spring 2012 trip to Lithuania for a seminar on staging revolutions.

A video posted on LifeNews on Thursday included an audio recording presented as a conversation between Lebedev, Razvozzhayev and Targamadze in a "CIS country" on May 14. The video also showed printouts of alleged Internet messages between the three before a June 12 protest.

In the recording, a person presented as Targamadze asked the activists about the May 6 protest on Bolotnaya Ploshchad and said Udaltsov's wife Anastasia should play a leading role in the opposition movement.

The person presented as Targamadze also said he was ready to discuss at a meeting in London transferring large sums of money to the activists.

The timing of the announcement, which was ostensibly prompted by a leak of investigative documents to LifeNews, the pro-Kremlin online tabloid, seemed deliberate. The Investigative Committee wrote at the beginning of its statement on Thursday that although it was "not interested in the premature publication" of the materials on Targamadze's involvement, it could confirm their contents now that they had already appeared in the press.

The authenticity of the recording and messages has not been verified, said analyst and former Kremlin insider Gleb Pavlovsky. The appearance of investigation materials in coordinated leaks, however, suggests that both the Investigative Committee and LifeNews are simply agents in a scheme directed by a third party, Pavlovsky said.

Olga Mefodyeva, an analyst at the Center for Political Technologies, said the leak was a continuation of the Investigative Committee's PR campaign against the three activists, which is covered on national television and which she said is more important than the actual investigation.

Udaltsov called the LifeNews material "childish babbling, ugly propaganda intended

to discredit the opposition and directed toward those who don't like to probe very deeply into a situation" in comments carried by Interfax.

Opposition leaders are preparing to hold an unsanctioned demonstration on Saturday after failing to agree with City Hall on a route for a march. It was apparently the first time the leaders had failed to come to terms with the authorities on a site for a major protest since last December.

Both sides said the other was responsible for the breakdown of talks.

Udaltsov said organizers had received an official rejection from City Hall on Thursday and that organizers do not intend to hold any unsanctioned rallies — but that he would go to Lubyanskaya Ploshchad on Saturday "as a free citizen."

"I myself will go to Lubyanskaya Ploshchad at 3 p.m. on December 15. As a free citizen of Russia. And no one can forbid me from going," Udaltsov tweeted on Thursday.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny said on his blog Thursday that he too will go to the square in front of the Federal Security Service building on Saturday afternoon.

The Investigative Committee statement comes amid a tentative thaw in Georgian–Russian relations under newly elected Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Investigators are preparing a request to Georgia to be sent in the near future to help in the investigation, they said in a statement. The Georgian prosecutor general's office said Thursday that it would not extradite Targamadze to Russia, Izvestia reported.

Razvozhayev's lawyer Dmitry Agranovsky said investigators' statement was a response to testimony from Targamadze that Razvozhayev's defense presented at a court hearing Wednesday. In the testimony, the politician said he has had no contacts with Udaltsov, Lebedev or Razvozhayev and did not finance their activities.

Agranovsky said the Investigative Committee was waging an information war against Razvozhayev and said the recordings and videos could easily have been falsified.

Journalist and opposition Coordination Council member Oleg Kashin said he thought that while Udaltsov was willing to meet with almost anyone to discuss revolution, taking large sums of money would run counter to his beliefs.

"I can't believe that he and his associates took any sizable amount of money for revolution, because I know his aestheticism and his temporal attitude toward everything," Kashin wrote in a comment on news site Snob.ru.

If the LifeNews materials are genuine, then Udaltsov meeting with "obvious provocateurs" like Targamadze speaks to his extremely low political acumen and is damaging to his reputation as a politician, Pavlovsky said.

"It makes it very difficult for many people to heed his calls to attend demonstrations, and his instructions about how to protest," he said.

The case against Udaltsov, Lebedev and Razvozzhayev was opened in October after the airing of the NTV expose "Anatomy of a Protest 2," which said Targamadze had spoken with Udaltsov about seizing power in Kaliningrad and Vladivostok. The film alleged to show hidden camera footage of a meeting between the two in Minsk that the Investigative Committee said was genuine.

News reports have said Targamadze participated in revolutions across the former Soviet Union, including the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, and in political events in other countries.

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