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Obama: Nemtsov's Murder Sign of Worsening Climate in Russia

By The Moscow Times

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U.S. President Barack Obama has said the murder of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov is a sign of an increasingly "constrained" climate within Russia.

President Barack Obama said on Monday that the killing of opposition figure Boris Nemtsov is a sign of a worsening climate in Russia where civil rights and media freedoms have been rolled back in the last several years.

Nemtsov was gunned down near the Kremlin on Friday night in a gangland-style murder.

"This is an indication of a climate at least inside of Russia in which civil society, independent journalists, people trying to communicate on the Internet, have felt increasingly threatened, constrained. And increasingly the only information that the Russian public is able to get is through state-controlled media outlets," Obama said in an interview.

The U.S. president has called for a full investigation into the slaying of Nemtsov, a critic

of President Vladimir Putin, and a former deputy prime minister.

"I have no idea at this point exactly what happened. What I do know is more broadly the fact that freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of information, basic civil rights and civil liberties inside of Russia are in much worse shape now than they were four or five, ten years ago," he said.

Obama met Nemtsov met during a trip in 2009 to Moscow, where the U.S. president held talks with opposition parties.

He said the killing is "part of what has allowed I think Russia to engage in the sort of aggression that it has against Ukraine," he said.

Nemtsov, 55, was one of the leading lights of a divided opposition struggling to revive its fortunes. Russian authorities have suggested the opposition itself may have been behind his shooting in an attempt to create a martyr and unite the fractured movement.

Nemtsov's supporters have blamed the authorities for his killing.

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