The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

British Inquiry Finds Putin 'Probably' Approved Litvinenko Murder

By Daria Litvinova

January 21, 2016



Russian President Vladimir Putin

A British inquiry into the high-profile case of Alexander Litvinenko, a Russian former Federal Security Service (FSB) officer poisoned in London in 2006, concluded that he was murdered by two Russians, "probably" following FSB instructions that were "probably" approved by President Vladimir Putin, the report by retired High Court judge Robert Owen, published in London on Thursday, said.

The evidence indicated that State Duma deputy Andrei Lugovoi, and entrepreneur Dmitry Kovtun deliberately poisoned Litvinenko with tea laced with polonium 210, a rare and toxic isotope.

"The FSB operation to kill Mr. Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr. Patrushev [then director of the FSB] and also by President Putin," the report said, published on the inquiry's official website on Thursday.

Litvinenko was 43. He died 22 days after drinking the tea in the company of Lugovoi and Kovtun — the associates met in the upscale Millennium Hotel in London, and Litvinenko fell ill within hours following the encounter.

London physicians were unable to diagnose him until only several hours prior to his death, when they confirmed that high levels of polonium had been discovered in his system.

Litvinenko, a critic of the Kremlin, accused Putin of his murder in his deathbed statement — a charge the Russian president has denied. Lugovoi and Kovtun have also denied the charges numerous times.

Russian authorities refused to extradite the two men to Britain, and, according to an unidentified source within Russian law enforcement cited by the Interfax news agency, will not do so in the future, nor prosecute Lugovoi and Kovtun in Russia.

“In Moscow the ruling is considered to be politically motivated, that's why Kovtun and Lugovoi will not be criminally prosecuted in Russia,” the source said.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova echoed his claim. “We are sorry that this purely criminal case was politicized and affected bilateral relations [between the two countries],” she said in an online statement published on the ministry's website.

“Accusations toward me are absurd,” Lugovoi told the Interfax news agency. “The results of the inquiry that were released today confirm London's anti-Russian position,” he said. Kovtun refused to comment on the inquiry.

The bank accounts of both Lugovoi and Kovtun in the U.K. will be frozen, the U.K. Home Secretary Theresa May said in the British parliament, the TASS news agency reported. She added that Russia's ambassador to the U.K. would be summoned to the country's Foreign Ministry, and government officials will express “profound displeasure” with Russia's unwillingness to cooperate with the case, the report said.

Contact the author at d.litvinova@imedia.ru

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/01/21/british-inquiry-finds-putin-probably-approved-litvinenko-murder-a51536