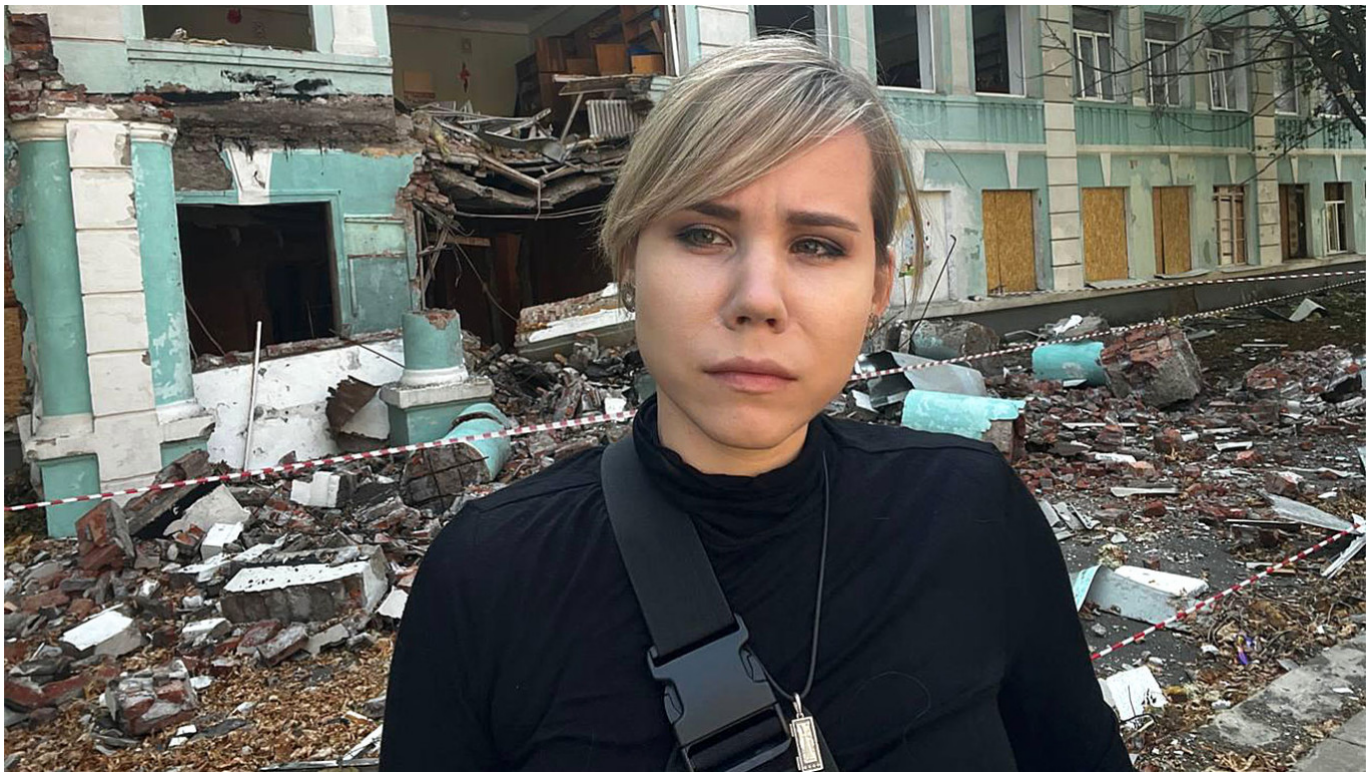
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Who Killed Daria Dugina? Untruths and Consequences

The Russian blame machine is spinning versions that don't bear scrutiny.

By Victor Davidoff

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Daria Dugina in the Donbas. **t.me/dplatonova**

Ever since the car that ultra-right-wing journalist Daria Dugina was driving exploded on a highway near Moscow on Saturday night, the Russian blame machine has been spitting out versions of guilt non-stop.

The first version was the same as the last version. Denis Pushilin, head of the separatist Donetsk Republic (DNR), blamed the attack on Ukrainian special services. However, Pushilin did not provide any facts and is known for blaming everything bad that happens in the world on Ukraine.

The second version was exotic. It rejected political motives for the murder and claimed that Daria Dugina was a member, if not the head, of a criminal gang engaged in racketeering in the Moscow region. She was the victim of a gang-war hit. There was more than one source for this version, but they were all anonymous.

A doctoral student of philosophy who takes breaks from studying Plato to go out with tough gangsters to collect money from businessmen is a very good plot for a Hollywood thriller. But it has nothing to do with reality.

The next version took us even farther — into the world of Frederick Forsythe and John le Carré. According to this version, Dugina acted as an intermediary for the illegal transfer of money from the Kremlin to the French far-right politician Marine Le Pen. In this tale, Dugina kept some of the money and paid the price for it.

This version has one thing going for it: Dugina did meet with Le Pen, but that was ten years ago when Dugina was studying in France. And it's true that the Kremlin financed Le Pen, but it was done differently: her party took loans it didn't have to pay back from European banks affiliated with Moscow. If any money was passed on in suitcases, it was done by professionals, not students.

Even more confusion was sown by former Russian State Duma deputy Ilya Ponomarev, who was one of the few Russian deputies who voted against the annexation of Crimea and participated in protest rallies in Moscow. Naturally, a criminal case was brought against him, and he fled to Kyiv. On Sunday Ponomarev read a statement on Ukrainian television on behalf of the "National Republican Army," which claimed responsibility for the attack. No one had heard of this group until then. It has a channel on Telegram, but there is no proof it really exists.

And then finally the people who are supposed to present a version spoke up. The Federal Security Service (FSB, successor to the KGB) announced that it had solved the crime and named the suspect: a 43-year-old Ukrainian citizen Natalia Vovk, née Shaban. According to the FSB, she entered Russia about a month ago and rented an apartment in the same house where the victim lived.

However, the FSB report raised more questions than it answered. The only thing that is known is that Vovk-Shaban was a clerk in the Ukrainian National Guard, according to her relatives.

It is inconceivable that such a complex operation could have been carried out by a lone agent. Where did the professionally made bomb came from? How did she get to Moscow? The Russian-Ukrainian border is closed. She might have entered Russia through the DNR, but if she did, then the whole story changes.

"*If Vovk came to Russia via DNR, it means it wasn't a Ukrainian special op, it was a Russian special op.*"

The possibility that this was a false flag operation organized by Russia got some confirmation

on late Monday when a photo appeared of Vovk and her husband Alexander, who was allegedly one of the organizers of a referendum to leave Ukraine in Donetsk region in 2014.

But the story doesn't quite hold up in any case. If the suspected terrorist lived in the same house as Daria Dugina, then she was the original target, not her father. But why would a journalist, little known even in narrow nationalist circles, be the target of assassination?

Within hours of the attack Kremlin propagandists accused others of guilt as well: the "pro-Ukrainian intelligentsia" in Russia, or more precisely, those who are against the war. Margarita Simonyan, head of the Russian propaganda television channel RT, wrote that "Everyone making fun of Dasha's death with snotty remarks and trolling — all those municipal council members, bloggers and activists should be arrested. Time to take out the trash."

State Duma deputy writer Zakhar Prilepin cast a wider net, blaming "the civilized world, all Europe, the collective Angelina Jolie, all those writers and songwriters" for the attack.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Maria Zakharova explicitly demanded that they "find a way to extend the available legal norms to information violence." In normal language this means: time to begin repressions.

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No matter who is responsible for this tragedy, it will be used to intensify repressions inside the country. As journalist Yulia Latynina asked right after the attack, "Is the murder of Dugin's daughter the new assassination of Kirov?" This refers to the Stalinist reign of terror, which began with the assassination of party leader Sergei Kirov in 1934.

Lyubov Sobol, a colleague of Alexei Navalny's at the Anti-Corruption Foundation, tweeted: "By the next morning the murder already seemed to make no sense — no one cared about Dugin, and especially his daughter. But now it's clear that it was some kind of primitive FSB false flag operation."

All terror has its logic. Today Putin is in a very tough situation: the war looks like it will drag on for years with no victory in sight. Russia can only hold the occupied territories through violence and bayonets. Sanctions are slowly killing the economy. It is impossible for a dictator to admit defeat, and someone must be blamed for all the failures.

This is what Stalin always did. Putin is unlikely to find a better solution.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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