



Stalin's Disciple

Vladimir Putin and Russia's Newest "Wet Affairs"¹

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On January 21, 1924, Vladimir Lenin died. A power struggle ensued between the members of the Soviet Politburo – Nikolai Bukharin, Lev Kamenev, Alexei Rykov, Josef Stalin, Mikhail Tomskey, Leon Trotsky, and Grigori Zinoviev. Using his position as general secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union Central Committee, Stalin eventually consolidated his power and eliminated his rivals.

By the late 1920s, many of the old Bolsheviks argued that continued dictatorship was unnecessary and were opposed to Stalin's policies and corruption. His collectivization campaign following the 1928 grain shortages was widely opposed and resulted in the famines with widespread death in 1932-1933. Migration of peasants to the cities led to fear of uprisings. Factions led by Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin challenged Stalin. His reaction was a long-lasting and bloody purge of any perceived opponent. The igniting spark was the December 1, 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov, a popular potential rival to Stalin, on Stalin's orders.² Most of the Politburo members subsequently were shot or forced to commit suicide during the Great Purge.

- Valerian Kuibyshev – died of unknown causes in 1935.
- Lev Kamenev (original Politburo member) – tried in August 1936 show trial and shot.
- Grigori Zinoviev (Comintern chairman and original Politburo member) – tried in August 1936 show trial and shot.
- Mikhail Tomskey (original Politburo member) – forced to commit suicide in 1936.
- Nikolai Uglanov – shot in 1937.

1. "Wet affairs" are killings.

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sergey-Mironovich-Kirov>. Retrieved September 12, 2016.

- Karl Bauman – tried in 1937 and shot.
- Grigori Sokolnikov (member first Politburo) – arrested in 1937 ("Trial of 17"). Killed in prison by the NKVD.
- Georgi Konstantinovich – forced to commit suicide in 1937.
- Nikolai Krestinsky – tried in 1938 and shot.
- Nikolai Bukharin (original Politburo member) – tried in 1938 and shot.
- Aleksei Rykov (original Politburo member, former premier) – tried in 1938 and shot.
- Yan Rudzutak – tried in 1938 and shot.
- Vlas Chubar – presumed executed in 1938.
- Stanislav Kosior – shot in 1938.
- Sergei Syrtsov – believed died in 1938, details unknown.
- Andrei Bubnov (member first Politburo) – Arrested Oct 1937, shot in 1938.
- Andrei Andreyev – date and manner of death unknown.
- Pavel Postyshev – executed in 1939.
- Robert Eikhe (Eihe) – executed in 1940.
- Leon Trotsky (founder of the Red Army and Stalin's last living rival) – assassinated in 1940 in Mexico City by NKVD agent.
- Nikolai Yezhov (head of the secret police 1936-1938 and chief executioner during the Purges) – executed in 1940.
- Lavrentij Beria (head of the NKVD 1941-1953) – shot in 1953.³
- Grigori Petrovsky – removed from his position in 1939, life spared, died 1958.⁴

A series of show trials began in August 1936. In the initial trials, Zinoviev and Kamenev "confessed." After the January 1937 show trial "Trial of the 17," Karl Radek, Yuri Piatakov, Grigori Sokolnikov, and ten others were executed; four others were sent to the Gulag, where they died. A secret trial of Red Army commanders in June 1937 wiped out much of the higher ranks. The March 1938 show trial "Trial of the 21" convicted, among others, Nikolai Bukharin; Alexei Rykov; and Genrikh Yagoda, the disgraced head of the NKVD.

3. The Soviet secret service went through a number of changes from 1917: 1917 – Cheka, 1922 – NKVD-GPU, 1923 – OGPU, 1934 – GUGB, 1941 – NKGB, 1946 – MGB, 1953 – MVD, 1954 – KGB. In 1991 the service was divided into three parts: SVR – Foreign Intelligence Service, FSB – Security Service, and FSO – Protective Service. Robert W. Pringle. "Guide to Soviet and Russian Intelligence Services," *Guide to the Study of Intelligence*, Association of Former Intelligence Officers, 2016, 51. For simplicity in this article, "NKVD" will be used for the period of Stalin's reign and "KGB" for the post-Stalin period until 1991.

4. <http://www.cyberusssr.com/rus/polit-hist.html>.

According to declassified Soviet archives, during 1937 and 1938, the NKVD detained 1,548,366 persons, of whom 681,692 were shot – an average of 1,000 executions a day.⁵ These included writers, poets, scientists, 85% of the Russian Greek Orthodox clergy, American communist immigrants to the USSR, and other intelligentsia. Added to the internal purges following the Nazi-Soviet 1939 invasion of Poland, the NKVD made over 143,810 arrests and shot 111,000, including at the infamous Katyn Forest massacre.⁶

About Stalin, Soviet secret services expert Robert Pringle wrote:

“In his last years, Stalin was increasingly paranoid. By early 1953, there were more than 5,000,000 people in the Gulag or internal exile. In 1950, several of the Party’s young stars were purged, and in 1952-1953, Stalin turned against the country’s Jews. The MVD (renamed NKVD) concocted the Doctors’ Plot to implicate thousands of leading Jews as Anglo-American spies. Stalin’s death on March 1, 1953, saved many of these people.”⁷

Given Stalin’s known extraterritorial assassinations, questions remain whether some of the Soviet sympathizers/spies who were unmasked in the US died of natural causes, as initially reported. A case in question is the 1948 supposed suicide of State Department employee and NKVD agent Laurence Duggan, who fell to his death from the window of his 16th-floor office in New York City with one overshoe on and the other in his office.

Former KGB London resident (chief of station) and defector to Britain, Oleg Gordievsky, wrote that Nikita Khrushchev (1955-1964), Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), and Yuri Andropov (1982-1984) avoided ordering political killings if they could be tied to Moscow. There were exceptions. One was the attempted assassination of Nikolai Khokhlov, a 1975 KGB defector, who suffered radiation poisoning but lived.⁸ Anti-Soviet writer and 1970 Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn apparently survived an August 1971 poisoning attempt.⁹ Most notorious was the

1978 assassination of Bulgarian critic Georgi Markov, who was shot with a ricin pellet from an umbrella on Waterloo Bridge in London.¹⁰ There were no political assassinations under Gorbachev or Boris Yeltsin according to Gordievsky.¹¹ The *New York Times* reported that there were more than 500 contract killings in Russia in 1994. Despite Gordievsky’s judgment the 1995 death of banker Ivan Kivelidi, head of the Russian Business Roundtable and a corruption fighter, and his secretary, from cadmium poisoning, likely placed in a telephone handset, has the hallmarks of a professional Federal Security Service (FSB, one of the successor organizations to the KGB) assassination.¹²

The Yeltsin period was a disaster for Russia.

Resentment in Russia grew in the 1990s as the country tottered toward collapse. Organized crime ran rampant. The oligarchy plundered and hoarded the country’s wealth. Financial schemes defrauded millions. Foreign groups plucked up strategic Russian assets.... Yeltsin’s leadership eroded as he struggled with his own alcoholism, the various political parties in the legislature and his family’s feuds with political parties, security services and oligarchs....

In 1998, a dangerous financial crisis sent the country into a nosedive. Inflation reached 84 percent. The government could not pay pensions and defaulted on foreign debt. The currency was repeatedly devalued... Mass strikes erupted across the country... the \$5 billion relief package doled out by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund never made it into the system – it was stolen upon arrival...¹³ Most assassinations during this period were contract criminal activity.¹⁴

The Disciple

Vladimir Putin served as a KGB officer from 1975 to 1991. From March 1997 to May 1998, he was Deputy Chief of Staff to President Boris Yeltsin. In July 1998, he was appointed head of the FSB. In 1999, he became Prime Minister. Elected President in 2000, Putin served two terms until 2008. Then he exchanged jobs with Dmitri Medvedev and served as Prime Minister from

5. Richard Pipes. *Communism: A History*. (New York: Modern Library Chronicles, 2001), 67.

6. Timothy Snyder. *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (Basic Books, 2010), 103-4.

7. Pringle, “Soviet and Russian Intelligence Services.” The political memoirs of Vyacheslav Molotov, published in 1993, claimed that Beria had boasted to Molotov that he poisoned Stalin: “I took him out.” Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*. (New York: Vintage, 2005), 571.

8. Fred Burton. “Playing by Moscow Rules: The Murder of Alexander Litvinenko,” *Stratfor*, January 30, 2016. <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/playing-moscow-rules-murder-alexander-litvinenko>.

9. Oleg Kalugin. *The First Directorate*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994), 180.

10. Ibid, 178. Former KGB Major General Kalugin commented that he was present at the planning for Markov’s assassination. Michael Weiss. “Is This American Spy Dead? Or Was He Ever Real?,” *The Daily Beast*, July 8, 2016. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/07/09/is-this-american-spy-dead-or-was-he-ever-real.html>.

11. Oleg Gordievsky. “Russia’s Killing Ways,” *Washington Post*, December 14, 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/13/AR2006121301909.html>.

12. Alessandra Stanley. “Moscow Journal; To the Business Risks in Russia, Add Poisoning,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1995.

13. Lauren Goodrich. “Putin’s Iron Grip, Forged in the Fires of Terrorism,” *Analysis, Stratfor*, September 4, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/09/world/moscow-journal-to-the-business-risks-in-russia-add-poisoning.html>.

14. “U.S.: Death of a Russian Defector,” *Analysis, Stratfor*, July 9, 2010.

2008 until 2012. He was re-elected President in 2012, with Medvedev Prime Minister once again. Putin assumed power at a violent time.

The first two weeks of September 1999 changed Russia. A series of bombings hit four apartment blocks in Moscow ... over the course of 12 days, killing 293 people and injuring more than 1,000. Initially, Chechen militant commanders claimed the attacks, and the Russian people rallied behind the start of a Second Chechen War – and behind Putin. Within three months, Yeltsin had resigned early, Putin became acting president, and his new Unity party surged into parliament on a campaign of war...

Naturally, conspiracy theories that Putin and the FSB were responsible for the attacks continue to swirl...

An unprecedented reign of terror across Russia transformed Putin from salvager to savior. On Aug. 24, terrorists simultaneously blew up two Russian aircraft in mid-flight. Six days later, a suicide bomber killed 10 people in a Moscow subway. And in what is seen as Russia's most savage terrorist attack, Caucasus militants took hostages at a primary school in the city of Beslan at the start of September, resulting in 385 deaths, 186 of them children...

After the Beslan siege, Putin pushed through a series of draconian laws, restricting the media and nongovernmental organizations, broadening the definition of terrorism and empowering the security services...

With its new power, the state crushed most of the oligarchs, incorporated some of them and centralized ownership of strategic enterprises. The government

stabilized the financial sector by propping up the currency and restructuring the banks. The quality of life for the average Russian skyrocketed, and political unrest subsided; most parties were weeded out of the government and legislature. Putin politically consolidated the country under one party, United Russia..."¹⁵

But, as Putin critic Gordievsky noted:

The gangster mentality started to spread after 2000; there were assassinations inside the country, of enemies of the regime. But there were so many contract killings at the time under Putin that it was difficult to tell which were the work of the FSB and which were not. In that atmosphere, it was easy to disguise an assassination.

The FSB has also become a protection racket.¹⁶

Table 1 lists some of those known to have died, some mysteriously, since Putin assumed power in Moscow. It is impossible for any outside observer to discern beyond a reasonable doubt the circumstances of many of the deaths in Russia. If one thinks like an actuary, and not a lawyer, one concludes that the life expectancy of opponents of Putin has diminished in recent years. This listing is not comprehensive. Open sources may not reflect all mysterious deaths or other actions that might be punitive against opponents of Russia's rulers.

15. Goodrich, "Putin's Iron Grip." <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/us-death-russian-defector>.

16. Gordievsky, "Russia's Killing Ways."

TABLE 1. SOME OF THE INDIVIDUALS ATTACKED, KILLED, SENTENCED OR SILENCED SINCE THE RISE OF PUTIN

NAME	POSITION	SOURCE
Galina Starovoitova Gunned down in entryway of her St. Petersburg apartment building. Nov. 20, 1998	Duma (Parliament) deputy and leader of pro-democracy opposition. Opposed First Chechen War. Also opposed empowerment of the FSB. Mastermind never identified.	La Russophobe, The Putin Murders: A Brief History of Putintime, https://larussophobe.wordpress.com/putinmurders/ retrieved August 29, 2016.
Yuri Skuratov Silenced after sex tape of him with two women shown on Russian TV. Mar. 17, 1999	Russian prosecutor general, 1995-1999. Critical of Yeltsin. Was investigating illegal offshore money transfers.	"Follow the Money – The Latest Kremlin Scandal Involves Billions of Dollars Moving Offshore – Plus Sex and Videotape," <i>Newsweek</i> , March 29, 1999; The Putin Murders: A Brief History of Putintime, La Russophobe.
Ibn al-Khattab Poisoned by sarin in a letter delivered by an FSB agent. Mar. 20, 2002	Saudi-born Chechen rebel military leader, previously an anti-Soviet mujahedeen fighter in Afghanistan.	Andrew E. Kramer, "More of Kremlin's Opponents Are Ending Up Dead," <i>New York Times</i> , August 20, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/21/world/europe/moscow-kremlin-silence-critics-poison.html?_r=0
Sergei Yushenkov Gunned down in entrance of his apartment block. Apr. 17, 2003	Co-chairman of Liberal Russia movement, member of the Duma. Part of the non-government Kovalev Commission, formed to investigate allegations that Putin's FSB bombed the Moscow apartments in 1999 to justify the Second Chechen War.	La Russophobe, "The Putin Murders: A Brief History of Putintime."

NAME	POSITION	SOURCE
Yuri Shchekochikhin Poisoned before trip to US to talk with the FBI. Died. Jul. 3, 2003	Investigative journalist for <i>Novaya Gazeta</i> and Duma member. Investigated FSB corruption and money laundering via Bank of New York. Had also been part of Kovalev Commission. Authorities refused an autopsy. Skin sample showed possible thallium poisoning.	Ibid.
Mikhail Trepashkin Arrested. Oct. 22, 2003	Lawyer, former KGB officer. Uncovered suspected FSB involvement in apartment house bombings. Was lawyer for Kovalev Commission. Arrested a week before presenting his case, initially for illegal possession of a firearm, and later for espionage. Sentenced to four years. Freed 2007.	Ibid.
Mikhail Khodorkovsky Arrested. Oct. 25, 2003	One of original oligarchs. Head of Yukos oil company. Supported parties opposing Putin. Originally arrested for fraud and sentenced to nine years, later sentenced for embezzlement with another four years. Released in Dec. 2013. Yukos broken up and “sold” to government entities.	Andrew Kramer, “Russian Oil Magnate Forced To Sell to Putin Loyalist, He Says,” <i>New York Times</i> , July 31, 2007.
Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev Killed by a car bomb in Doha, Qatar. Feb. 13, 2004	Acting president of the break-away Chechen Republic, 1996-1997. Three Russian agents arrested. One with diplomatic immunity released; two others returned to Russia after five months to serve their life sentences but soon went missing, probably released.	Sarah Rainsford, “Convicted Russia Agents ‘Missing’,” <i>BBC News</i> , February 17, 2005.
Paul Klebnikov Machine-gunned on Moscow street. Jul. 9, 2004	American editor of <i>Forbes Russia</i> , investigative journalist. Had written about FSB corruption and identified Russia’s richest people. Exposed business empire of Kremlin kingpin, Boris Berezovsky. Russian investigation stalled despite US diplomatic pressure.	<i>La Russophobe</i> , “The Putin Murders.”
Nikolai Girenko Shot dead in St. Petersburg. Jun. 19, 2004.	Human rights defender, expert witness. Despite a claim of responsibility by the head of the neo-Nazi Russian Republic, investigation led nowhere.	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Girenko
Viktor Yushchenko Poisoned by dioxin. Probably on Sept. 5, 2004	Anti-Russian candidate for presidency in Ukraine. Poisoned probably in a meal of crayfish. Survived but disfigured. Later elected president of the Ukraine.	<i>La Russophobe</i> , “The Putin Murders.” The dioxin, similar to the “Yellow Rain” used by Vietnam against the Hmong in Laos, “was so pure that it was definitely made in a laboratory.” “Study: Dioxin that Poisoned Yushchenko Made in Lab,” <i>Associated Press</i> . Referenced in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Yushchenko#Dioxin_poisoning ; George P. Shultz, “Chemical warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan: An Update,” (Washington, DC: United States Department of State, November 1982).
Andrei Kozlov Shot dead, Sept. 14, 2006	First deputy chairman, Russia Central Bank, 1997-1999 and 2002-2006. Murdered days after accusing Diskont Bank in Russia and Raiffeisen Zentralbank in Austria of money laundering. Moldovan investigative reporter Natalia Morar, also examining Raiffeisen Zentralbank was threatened by the FSB and expelled from Russia as a threat to the security of the state. She was told, “There is no need to end your life with an article – someone might simply wait for you at the entrance to your apartment building, and they will not find a killer afterward.” This was a good summation of what has happened to several investigative reporters in Russia, including Dmitry Kholodov in 1994, Paul Klebnikov 10 years later, and Anna Politkovskaya in 2006.	Adam Federman, “Moscow’s New Rules,” <i>Columbia Journalism Review</i> , February 1, 2010. http://www.cjr.org/feature/moscows_new_rules.php .

NAME	POSITION	SOURCE
Alexander Litvinenko Poisoned by radioactive polonium-210 in London, UK. Died Nov. 23, 2006	Former KGB officer who fled to the UK, outspoken critic of Putin. Litvinenko accused Putin of corruption and directing the 1999 apartment bombings in Moscow to blame the Chechens. Also called Putin a pedophile. "Following years of trying to expose corruption in the FSB's upper echelons he had come to believe the agency was nothing more than a brute squad for Putin's government, bent on picking off the president's political opponents one by one."	Fred Burton, "Playing by Moscow Rules: The Murder of Alexander Litvinenko," <i>Stratfor</i> , January 30, 2016. https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/playing-moscow-rules-murder-alexander-litvinenko ; Howard Amos & Tom Parfitt. "Kremlin Critics Killed During Vladimir Putin's Leadership," <i>Telegraph</i> , February 28, 2015. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11441919/Kremlin-critics-killed-during-Vladimir-Putins-leadership.html ; "The Litvinenko Case and the Obstacles to Cross-Territorial Investigations, Analysis, <i>Stratfor</i> , December 9, 2006. https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/litvinenko-case-and-obstacles-cross-territorial-investigations .
Anna Politkovskaya Gunned down in her apartment block, Oct. 7, 2006	Journalist for the independent <i>Novaya Gazeta</i> , critic of Putin. Wrote about state corruption and rights abuses in Chechnya. "At the time of her death [she] was writing an article that allegedly included eye-witness accounts of Russians torturing Chechens as well as photographs of tortured bodies...." Survived a 2004 poisoning attempt on a flight to the Caucasus.	"The Putin Critics Who Have Been Assassinated," <i>SkyNews</i> , http://news.sky.com/story/the-putin-critics-who-have-been-assassinated-10369350 . Retrieved August 29, 2016; Gordievsky, "Russia's Killing Ways;" Richard Weitz, "The Mysterious Deaths of Russia's Journalists," <i>Hudson Institute</i> , April 8, 2007. http://www.hudson.org/research/5194-the-mysterious-deaths-of-russia-s-journalists- .
Daniel McGrory Found dead at home in Prince Georges County, MD, age 54, of apparent heart attack. Feb. 20, 2007	Senior correspondent for the <i>Times of London</i> . His death occurred five days before a scheduled <i>Dateline NBC</i> broadcast in which he was involved, linking the Kremlin to Litvinenko's assassination in London.	Eric Rich, "Analyst Robbed During Shooting," <i>Washington Post</i> , Mar. 5, 2007.
Paul Joyal Shot, critically wounded but survived. Adelphi, MD. Mar. 1, 2007	Security expert, commentator on Russian affairs, former staffer for the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Shooting took place four days after <i>Dateline NBC</i> broadcast in which Joyal said "A message has been communicated to anyone who wants to speak out against the Kremlin: 'If you do, no matter who you are, where you are, we will find you and we will silence you – in the most horrible way possible.'"	Ibid; Paul Joyal biography, http://nsi.publish-path.com/paul-joyal . Retrieved September 9, 2016.
Ivan Safronov Supposed suicide, Mar. 2, 2007	Retired Russian Space Force colonel and journalist. Accused of leaking military affairs to foreign parties. Revealed third failed test of Bulava SLBM. Revealed Russian straw sale via Belarus of advanced SAMs to Iran and Syria to avoid international sanctions.	Fred Burton & Scott Stewart, "Russia and the Return of the FSB," <i>Security Weekly</i> , <i>Stratfor</i> , April 2, 2008. https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russia_and_return_fsb ; "Ivan Safronov," Committee to Protect Journalists, https://cpj.org/killed/2007/ivan-safronov.php . Retrieved September 9, 2016.
Oleg Gordievsky Poisoned at home in Surrey, UK. Nov. 2, 2007	Soviet KGB resident in London and British agent since 1974. The Secret Intelligence Service secretly exfiltrated from Moscow July 1985. Sentenced to death in <i>absentia</i> for treason – still in effect. Poisoned probably by highly toxic thallium salt and was unconscious for 34 hours.	Sadie Gray, "Double agent Gordievsky claims he was poisoned by the Kremlin," <i>The Independent</i> , Apr. 6, 2010.
Oleg Zhukovsky Supposed suicide. Dec. 2007	VTB bank executive. Opposed the state's takeover, which wanted to appoint its own overseers. Allegedly performed the feat of committing suicide by being tied to a chair and thrown into his swimming pool, where he drowned.	Fred Burton & Ben West, "A Killing in Vienna and the Chechen Connection," <i>Security Weekly</i> , <i>Stratfor</i> , January 22, 2009. https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20090121_killing_vienna_and_chechen_connection .
Leonid Rozhetskii Disappeared in Latvia. Mar. 2008 Remains found in 2013.	Naturalized US citizen. International financier and lawyer. Held stakes in strategic companies, including mobile phone giant <i>MegaFon</i> . Lost Kremlin favor when he sold assets to multiple parties, including some former FSB agents.	Burton & Stewart, "Russia and the Return of the FSB."
Stanislav Markelov Gunned down in broad daylight in Moscow. Jan. 19, 2009	Human rights lawyer. Was campaigning against release of Russian colonel convicted of murdering a Chechen woman. Assassin used a silenced pistol. Anastasia Barburova, working with Markelov and killed with him, had previously studied with journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Authorities blamed a radical neo-Nazi group.	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staniislav_Markelov#Murder ; La Russophobe. "The Putin Murders."

NAME	POSITION	SOURCE
Natalia Estemirova Kidnapped in Grozny and shot. Jul. 14, 2009	Human rights activist. Critic of Chechen strongman and Putin ally Ramzan Kadyrov. Reported on government burning down rebel homes with women and children inside. Previously worked with journalist Anna Politkovskaya.	SkyNews, "The Putin Critics Who Have Been Assassinated."; La Russophobe, "The Putin Murders."
Sergei Magnitsky Died in police custody. Nov. 16, 2009	Lawyer. Investigated tax fraud against Hermitage Capital Management, a company owned by Putin supporter William Browder. Arrested in November 2008 and jailed without trial. After he discovered that police were involved, he was then accused of tax fraud. In November 2009, riot police burst into his cell and beat him to death. The Kremlin subsequently put Magnitsky on trial, even though he was already dead, after western countries sanctioned the corrupt officials involved.	Luke Harding, "Who Killed Boris Nemtsov? We Will Never Know," <i>The Guardian</i> , March 3, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/02/boris-nemtsov-never-know-who-killed-moscow-vladimir-putin-russian-opposition ; Letter to first deputy of the general prosecutor of the Russian Federation from the chairman of the Moscow Helsinki Group, March 26, 2010, at http://russian-untouchables.com/docs/D39.pdf .
Anatoly Sobchak Died in Kaliningrad reportedly of natural causes. Feb. 20, 2010	Putin's original mentor and former mayor of St. Petersburg. Asked by Putin to campaign in Kaliningrad. Journalist Arkadi Vaksberg wrote "two bodyguard-assistants, both physically fit young men, had to be treated for mild symptoms of poisoning following Sobchak's death. This was a hallmark of contract killings by poisoning: many a secretary or bodyguard had fallen similarly ill when their bosses were killed." A few months after his book was published, Vaksberg's car was blown up in his Moscow garage.	Masha Gessen, "The Best Theory for Explaining the Mysterious Death of Putin's Mentor," <i>Business Insider</i> , February 17, 2015. http://www.businessinsider.com/the-mysterious-death-of-putins-mentor-2015-2 .
Sergei Tretyakov Died, probably of natural causes. Jun. 13, 2010, although reported dates of death are inconsistent.	SVR officer at the UN who defected to the US in Oct. 2000. Known to have passed information to the FBI from 1997 until October 2000, when he officially defected. May have been original source on Russian "illegals" operating in the US and arrested in 2010. May have helped identify FBI spy Robert Hanssen.	Reliable sources tell the author that Tretyakov died of natural causes. However, conspiracy theories continue about his death. Given his history, he is included in this list. Stratfor, "US: Death of a Russian Defector."; Frank J. Rafalko (ed.), <i>Counterintelligence Reader</i> , Vol. 4, (Washington, DC: Office of the National Counterintelligence Executive, nd), 102-131
Alexander Perepilichny Died under mysterious circumstances in Surrey, UK. Nov. 10, 2012	Whistleblower helped to uncover a money-laundering scheme by Russian officials. Poisoned by <i>gelsemium elegans</i> , a lethal plant toxin from the Himalayas "favored by Chinese and Russian assassins."	Mary Louise Kelly, "The Curious Death of Kremlin Critics," NPR Now interview, August 30, 2016. http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/08/30/491898040/the-curious-deaths-of-kremlin-critics .
Boris Berezovsky Found dead at his home near Ascot, UK, with ligature around his neck in his bathroom. Mar. 23, 2013	Leader of Russian "oligarchs," powerful under Boris Yeltsin in 1990s. Built a fortune with investments in oil, cars, airplanes, aluminum, and TV stations. Berezovsky played an integral part in Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000. Fell out with Putin and fled to UK in 2000. Convicted in absentia of fraud and embezzlement. Reported to be an assassination target in 2003 and 2007.	Eric Spitznagel, "The Mysterious Death of Russian Oligarch Boris Berezovsky," <i>Bloomberg</i> , April 4, 2013. http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-04-04/the-mysterious-death-of-russian-oligarch-boris-berezovsky ; Eric Townsend & Simon Goodley, "Boris Berezovsky Found Dead," <i>The Guardian</i> , March 23, 2013; Alex Goldfarb & Marina Litvinenko, <i>Death of a Dissident</i> , (New York: The Free Press, 2007); UK House of Commons Written Answers for 13 Jan. 2004. http://www.publications.parliament.uk .
Alexei Navalny Sentenced to five years. Jul. 15, 2013	Anti-corruption lawyer and blogger. Critic of Putin. Leader of the Progress Party. Had called Putin's United Russia party the "party of swindlers and thieves." Arrested several times. Charged with defrauding several companies.	David M. Herzenhorn, "Putin Critic Gets 5-Year Jail Term, Setting Off Protests," <i>New York Times</i> , July 18, 2013.
Sergei Udaltsov Arrested and sentenced to four and a half years. Dec. 15, 2012	Organized a public protest against Putin in Lubanka Square. Had been arrested multiple times before and accused of trying to overthrow Putin.	David M. Herzenhorn, "Opposition Figure Wanted in Russia Says He Was Kidnapped and Tortured," <i>New York Times</i> , October 22, 2012; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Udaltsov .
Leonid Razvozzhaev Convicted and sentenced to four and a half years. Jul. 24, 2014	Parliamentary aide, colleague of Udaltsov. Accused of trying to overthrow Putin, fled to Ukraine on Oct. 15, 2012. Claims he was kidnapped and returned to Russia and tortured by the FSB.	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonid_Razvozzhaev .

NAME	POSITION	SOURCE
Mikhail Kosenko Arrested, charged with mass riot. Jun. 8, 2012	Street protester and anti-Putin activist. Sent to psychiatric detention for "chronic psychiatric disorder in the form of paranoid schizophrenia."	Boris Bruk, "Political Prisoners," Institute of Modern Russia, March 23, 2014. http://imrussia.org/en/special-projects/697-russias-political-prisoners-mikhail-kosenko .
Pussy Riot Sentenced to two years and jailed. August 2012	Girl band singing anti-Putin songs. Charged with "hooliganism" and fomenting "religious hatred." Released early just before Sochi Winter Olympics in Feb. 2014.	Ilya Arkhipov, "Pussy Riot Inmates Freed," Bloomberg, December 23, 2013. http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-12-23/pussy-riot-inmates-freed-from-prison-on-amnesty-before-olympics .
Boris Nemtsov Assassinated. Feb. 27, 2015	Former deputy prime minister turned public critic of Putin and Russian involvement in Ukraine. Shot four times from behind on a bridge near the Kremlin. FSB reportedly fingered Chechen ruler Ramzan Kadyrov as ordering the killing.	http://news.sky.com/story/the-putin-critics-who-have-been-assassinated-10369350 ; Harding, "Who Killed Boris Nemtsov? We Will Never Know."; Joshua Yaffa, "The Unaccountable Death of Boris Nemtsov," The New Yorker, February 26, 2016.
Christophe de Margerie Killed in Moscow airplane crash. Oct. 20, 2014	CEO of French oil company Total SA. Returning to France, his departing plane hit a snowplow on takeoff. His negotiations to fund the Yamal LNG project with Euros was in difficulty due to sanctions over Russia's activities in Ukraine. Russian sources blamed a CIA assassination plot.	BBC News, October 21, 2014. http://www.bbc.com/news/business-29699733 ; Sorcha Faal, "Russia Classifies CIA Assassination of Top French Oil CEO," October 21, 2014. http://www.whatdoesitmean.com/index1812.htm
Vladimir Kara-Murza Poisoned. May 2015	Traveled to the US to urge Congress to impose Maginsky Act sanctions against Russia. Believes he was poisoned on an Aeroflot flight. Suffered a week-long coma.	Andrew Kramer, "More of the Kremlin's Opponents Are Ending Up Dead," New York Times, August 20, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/21/world/europe/moscow-kremlin-silence-critics-poison.html?_r=0 .
Vladimir Yevtushenkov Jailed. Sept. 2015	Head of Russian oil company Bashneft. One of Russia's richest men. Accused of money laundering, but released after three months after the government seized his holding company, Sistema.	SkyNews, "The Putin Critics Who Have Been Assassinated."
Mikhail Lesin Died of blunt force trauma in Washington, DC. Nov. 5, 2015	Putin's former press minister. Later head of Gazprom-Media. Moved to Switzerland and the US. "He was one of the legendary Kremlin officials who helped Russian President Vladimir Putin consolidate power ... charged with handling the state's takeover of Russian media assets. He set up much of the Kremlin's modern propaganda machine, including the Russia Today channel." May have been talking with the FBI to avoid corruption charges. Had "[i]nsight on Putin's personal banker [that] would be of great interest to the United States and a serious threat to the Kremlin."	"A Mysterious Death in Washington," Analysis, Stratfor, March 11, 2016.
Igor Sergun Reportedly died at age 59 due to a heart attack. Jan. 4, 2016	Colonel General head of the GRU (Russian military intelligence). Was engaged in a power struggle with the FSB.	"A Mysterious Death Raises Questions in Russia," Geopolitical Diary, Stratfor, January 6, 2016.
Pavel Sheremet Killed by car bomb in Kiev, Ukraine. July 20, 2016	Belarus journalist critical of Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarussian policies. Stratfor analysis concluded well-trained assassins killed Sheremet probably with a "sticky bomb" and remote control.	"Identifying a Mundane but Deadly Threat," Stratfor, August 15, 2016. https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/identifying-mundane-deadly-threat .
Aleksandr Poteyev Reportedly died in the US. July 2016	SVR colonel and defector who revealed a ring of undercover spies arrested in 2010 in the US. Tried in <i>absentia</i> and sentenced to death. Death announced in the Russian, not US, press. "When Chapman and her fellow agents were exposed, Putin said: 'It is a result of betrayal, and traitors always end in a bad way. Usually from a drinking habit, or from drugs, right in the street.'" Questions remain whether Poteyev's death is real or whether reports of his death are in error or Russian disinformation for purposes of deterring others from defecting.	Will Stewart, "Mystery over 'death' of turncoat who Russian leader predicted would 'end in a bad way,'" London Sun, July 7, 2016. https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1407470/mystery-over-death-of-turncoat-who-russian-leader-predicted-would-end-in-a-bad-way/ .

Putin has embraced Stalin's method of dealing with opponents. If one considers the scale of Stalin's purges, arrests, and confinements to the Gulag, Putin pales by comparison.

The international Committee to Protect Journalists cites that since 1992, 56 journalists have been killed in Russia for whom the motive has been confirmed and another 24 for whom the motive is uncertain.¹⁷ "In recent years Russia, along with Iraq and Colombia, has become one of the most dangerous countries for journalists."¹⁸

On May 20, 2010, pro-Western Polish President Lech Kaczynski, an outspoken critic of Putin, and 95 others, many leaders of the newly anti-communist Poland, were killed in a plane crash at Smolensk Airport in Russia. The Polish delegation was coming to attend a ceremony commemorating the 1940 Katyn Forest massacre of as many as 22,000 Polish officers, officials, and intelligentsia by the NKVD. A Russian investigation, before Putin assumed power, after decades of denials, confirmed that the NKVD under Lavrenti Beria was responsible for the Katyn massacre. "Beria was Vladimir Putin's KGB predecessor."¹⁹ This, however, was an embarrassment to Putin's regime as was Kaczynski's push "to expose the secret police files of past and current collaborators of both the Polish and Soviet/Russian secret police."²⁰ The "Russians quickly took control of the crash site, recovered the black boxes, and – never to miss an intelligence-gathering opportunity – stripped the 96 dead passengers of personal effects, luggage, laptop computers, flash drives, cell phones, sensitive papers, names, telephone numbers, correspondence, documents, and top secret military and diplomatic codes – a coup for Russia's intelligence service."²¹ The Poles were excluded from

the crash investigation. The Russians blamed the crash on pilot error. Curiously, the victims' bodies were returned in sealed coffins, an unheard of practice in former crashes. Subsequent international professional crash studies concluded the crash "was caused by two bombs on board the plane."²² After the crash,

Prime Minister Donald Tusk pushed policies more favorable to Moscow and expressed skepticism over the US proposal for anti-ballistic missile defenses in Eastern Europe. Some opine the crash was "payback for Poland's alliance with NATO."²³

Observations

"Putin understands that oligarchs are truly kingmakers," New York University Professor Mark Galeotti

said. "And a kingmaker could easily become a kingbreaker. So he set out to either force them to submit to the Kremlin or destroy them"²⁴ just as Stalin had done seven decades previously to any potential rival.

Scholar Anne Applebaum sums it up: "As Russian (and Eastern European) history well demonstrates, it isn't always necessary to kill millions of people to frighten all the others: A few choice assassinations, in the right time and place, usually suffice. Since the arrest of oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2003, no other Russian oligarchs have attempted even to sound politically independent. After the assassination of Politkovskaya ... it's hard to imagine many Russian journalists following in her footsteps to Grozny either."²⁵

French historian Stéphane Courtois wrote that "Communist regimes ... turned mass crime into a full-blown system of government."²⁶ Former KGB officer Putin has returned to communist practices.

"Communist regimes ... turned mass crime into a full-blown system of government."

— Stéphane Courtois, French historian



"The important thing to know about an assassination is not who fired the shot, but who paid for the bullet."

— Eric Ambler, *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, 1939

17. "36 Journalists Murdered in Russia since 1992," Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/killed/europe/russia/murder.php>. Retrieved September 12, 2016.

18. Richard Weitz, "The Mysterious Deaths of Russian Journalists," the Hudson Institute. <http://www.hudson.org/research/5194-the-mysterious-deaths-of-russia-s-journalists>

19. Eugene Poteat, "Russian Image Management," *Charleston Mercury*, October 21, 2010. <http://www.doomedsoldiers.com/polish-tu-154-crash-russia.html>

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Eugene Poteat, "Poland Defies Putin," *American Thinker Blog*, January 30, 2016. http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2016/01/poland_defies_putin.html

23. Poteat, "Russian Image Management."

24. Eric Spitznagel, "The Mysterious Death of Russian Oligarch Boris Berezovsky," *Bloomberg*, April 4, 2013. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-04-04/the-mysterious-death-of-russian-oligarch-boris-berezovsky>

25. Cited in *La Russophobe*, "The Putin Murders: A Brief History of Putintime." Applebaum is the director of the Transitions Forum at the Legatum Institute in London, a former editor at *The Economist*, and is a member of the editorial board of the *Washington Post*.

26. Stéphane Courtois, "Introduction: The Crimes of Communism," in

Mark Kelton, a former CIA Chief of Station in Moscow, told National Public Radio, “The Russian [security] services have a long history of eliminating or trying to hunt down people who are seen as traitors.” Kelton points to a line from Eric Ambler’s 1939 espionage novel, *A Coffin for Dimitrios*: “The important thing to know about an assassination is not who fired the shot,” it reads, “but who paid for the bullet.”²⁷

Andrew Kramer noted, “Political murders, particularly those accomplished with poisons, are nothing new in Russia, going back five centuries. Nor are they particularly subtle. While typically not traceable to any individuals and plausibly denied by government officials, poisonings leave little doubt of the state’s involvement — which may be precisely the point. ... Poison has been a favorite tool of Russian intelligence for more than a century. A biochemist, Grigory Mairanovski, labored in secret starting in 1928, on the task of developing tasteless, colorless, and odorless poisons. In 1954, a K.G.B. defector described a secret lab near the agency’s Lubyanka headquarters and ‘experiments on living people.’”²⁸

Putin “has made no secret of his ambition to restore [Russia] to what he sees as its rightful place among the world’s leading nations.... Muckraking journalists, rights advocates, opposition politicians, government whistle-blowers and other Russians who threaten that image are treated harshly — imprisoned on trumped-up charges, smeared in the news media and, with increasing frequency, killed....”²⁹ Russia’s image was badly tarnished by the Sochi Olympics doping scandal and the exclusion of Russian athletes from the Rio Games. Athlete whistleblower Yuliya Stepanova, whose World Anti-Doping Agency file was cyber-hacked, has gone into hiding. Dr. Grigori Rodchenkov, the former director of Russia’s anti-doping laboratory, who gave an accusatory *New York Times* interview, has fled to the US.³⁰

Stéphane Courtois (ed.), *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, translated by Mark Kramer, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2.

27. Kelly, “The Curious Death of Kremlin Critics.”

28. Kramer. “More of Kremlin’s Opponents Are Ending Up Dead.”

29. Ibid.

30. Rebecca Ruiz. “Russian Sports Doping: Explained,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/17/sports/>

Stratfor assesses that “[i]nside the Kremlin, infighting continues to rise dangerously. In recent months, [Putin] ousted one of the most powerful men in the country, Sergei Ivanov, while battling another, Igor Sechin.”³¹ Elites within the FSB who are connected with Ivanov and Sechin have been grappling for more power. And concerns of a revolt among the Kremlin

elite prompted Putin to set up his own personal military, answerable only to him.”³²

Given Stalin and now Putin “[n]o other major power employs murder as systematically and ruthlessly as Russia does against those seen as betraying its interests abroad. Killings outside Russia were even given legal sanction by the

nation’s Parliament in 2006.”³³

What can we expect? Given history and no blow-back or effective constraints on Putin, more of the same.

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olympics/russian-sports-doping-explained.html; WADA, “WADA confirms illegal activity on Yuliya Stepanova’s ADAMS account, press release, August 13, 2016; BBC News, “Russian doping: Who is whistleblower Grigori Rodchenkov?,” July 19, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36833962>.

31. Ivanov has been Russian deputy prime minister, defense minister, and, up until August 2016, chief of staff to Putin’s presidential office. Sechin, called Russia’s second most powerful person, previously was a deputy prime minister and is executive chairman of Rosneft, the Russian Government’s large oil company. The US Government sanctioned both individuals for corruption. Dan Peleschuk. “Think it’s just Putin who runs Russia?” CNBC, December 24, 2014.

32. Putin’s “National Guard” resembles the Nazi Party’s Schutzstaffel (SS) originally formed in 1925 as the party’s security and protection organ. “A Rare Backtrack for Putin as His Mandate Crumbles,” *Geopolitical Diary*, Stratfor, September 8, 2016. <https://www.stratfor.com/geopolitical-diary/rare-backtrack-putin-his-mandate-crumbles>.

33. Kramer. “More of Kremlin’s Opponents Are Ending Up Dead.”