



The Pre-Mortem Assessment:

WHO POISONED KARINNA MOSKALENKO?

Game Rules

- It's a game, have fun.
- Keep mum if you know the case!
- Every vote counts, so vote!

The Stage is Set...

- ◆ Imagine it is October 2008, and you are a Russia analyst sitting in your home country, combing through the reams of reporting you receive on a daily basis.



The Headlines Roll In...

- ◆ As you peruse the morning papers, you notice a glaring and most unsettling headline.

The Washington Post

washingtonpost.com

The Washington Post

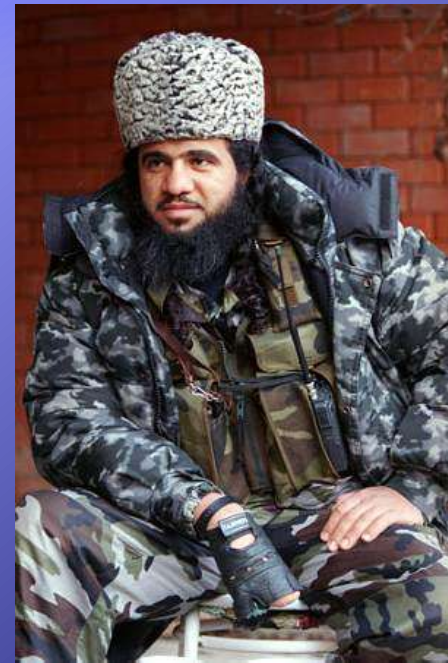
October 22, 2008 Wednesday
Regional Edition

More Poison;

Another prominent adversary of Vladimir Putin is mysteriously exposed to toxins.

Down Memory Lane...Chechen Rebels

- ◆ In 2002, notorious guerrilla commander Omar Ibn al-Khattab – who played a leading role in numerous attacks on Russian interests in the second Chechen war--was killed by a poisoned letter slipped to him by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). The FSB accused Khattab of links to Al-Qaida.



Foreign Political Opponents...

- ◆ Also in 2004, then Ukrainian Presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko underwent a dramatic transformation that medical experts determined was the result of dioxin poisoning. The Ukrainian prosecutor general said that test confirm highly purified dioxin was manufactured in Russia, the US, or Great Britain



Journalists...

- ◆ You recall that not just Chechens, but journalists like Anna Politkovskaya have also been probable targets. Politkovskaya was gunned down in 2006 outside of her apartment. She had chronicled alleged Russian abuses in Chechnya, and claimed she was given poisoned tea in 2004 on her way to cover the Beslan School tragedy.



Then there was the radioactive thing...

- ◆ You remember the 2006 murder of Aleksander Litvinenko, a one time Russian KGB officer. He was poisoned by a radioactive isotope, polonium-210, that was slipped into his tea at an upscale London hotel. A radioactive trail was traced across London, to Hamburg, Germany, and aboard British Airways planes that had flown to Moscow. The trail followed the routes of the prime suspect, Andrei Lugovoi, and his associate, Dmitri Kovtun.



And Now This...

As the details of the case emerge, you are not surprised to learn that another Kremlin critic has been felled. This time, it is Karinna Moskalenko, a prominent human rights lawyer who has represented some of the Kremlin's biggest enemies...

The International Herald Tribune

October 16, 2008 Thursday

Toxic pellets fell Russian rights lawyer

BYLINE: Michael Schwartz and Alan Cowell - The New York Times Media Group

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 3

LENGTH: 598 words

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Rights,

"French Police are investigating how toxic mercury pellets ended up in the car of a human rights lawyer who fell ill in Strasbourg on Tuesday, a day before pretrial hearings in the Moscow into the killing of one of her best-known clients, the journalist and Kremlin critic Anna Politkovskaya." -- International Herald Tribune

The Strasbourg police said Moskalenko's husband, a chemist, had discovered "about 10 little pellets of liquid metal" in the family car on Sunday. They were on the floor on both the driver's and passenger's sides of the vehicle, Le Figaro newspaper reported, quoting an unidentified source close to the police inquiry.

"The Strasbourg police said Moskalenko's husband, a chemist, discovered 'about 10 little pellets of liquid metal' in the family car on Sunday. They were on the floor of both the driver's and passenger's side of the vehicle..." -- International Herald Tribune

She has also represented Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the jailed oil tycoon. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Moskalenko's clients have included Garry Kasparov, the former chess champion who has become an opposition political leader in Russia.

Details Emerge...

- ◆ “People do not put mercury in your car to improve your health,” Moskalenko told Russian radio station Ekho-Moskvy.
- ◆ The Courier Mail reports that Moskalenko “suspects she and her family were poisoned by mercury found in her car, keeping her from the start of the trial...”
- ◆ Toxicology analysis confirms that she suffers from mercury poisoning. – International Herald Tribune



A Familiar Picture...

- ◆ As you comb through the incoming press reports, a familiar picture forms, and your analysis begins to take shape in your mind: “Karinna Moskalenko is the latest victim in a series of Russian attacks on Kremlin critics.”

The Independent (London)

October 16, 2008 Thursday
First Edition

Poison stalks trial of murdered Putin critic;
Lawyer for family of Anna Politkovskaya stricken Police confirm mercury
found in car in France

BYLINE: Miriam Elder IN MOSCOW

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 18

LENGTH: 690 words

A LAWYER representing the family of investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya has apparently been targeted by poisoners as the trial of three men accused of involvement in her murder was about to begin.

“Another lawyer...said the timing was suspicious. This type of event gives all pause to consider what it takes now in Russia to defend human rights. There are ongoing attacks on lawyers and journalists’.” – The Independent

Ms Moskalenko is a leading defender of the Kremlin's critics, including the jailed former oil tycoon and ex-chief executive of Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky and the chess-champion-turned opposition politician Garry Kasparov. She said that she believed the poisoning was a warning. “When we got to the car, we realised something was not normal. My husband is a chemist and the substance looked like mercury. I'm worried for my family,” she said.

“Kremlin critics have often been the targets of poisoners.” – The Independent

Sergei Sokolov, the deputy editor of Ms Politkovskaya's newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, said that Ms Moskalenko “takes part in a lot of prominent cases. It's not necessarily directly linked to this case.” Ms Moskalenko helps Russians press claims against the government at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The Investigation Plods on...

◆ ...and the court of public opinion has spoken. After a week, your boss wants to know what to tell senior government leadership. All signs point toward Russia, but good tradecraft tells you to investigate further...

The Washington Post
washingtonpost.com
The Washington Post
October 22, 2008 Wednesday
Regional Edition

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"Perhaps this was an unfortunate accident; the police in Strasbourg say they are still investigating. But history suggests otherwise. Numerous opponents of Mr. Putin have been killed or gravely sickened by poisoning. They include Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko; dissident former KGB officer Litvinenko; journalist Yuri Shchekochikhin; and Ms. Politkovskaya..." – The Washington Post

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Moskalenko is a formidable opponent and is not easily frightened: She told the Moscow Times that "nothing will prevent me" from appearing at the next hearing of the Politkovskaya case on Nov. 17. Let's hope she's right.

Your Analysis:

- ◆ Your boss tells you that senior government officials want your organization's analytic judgment on the issue.
- ◆ The reigning view in your organization is that Karinna Moskalenko is a victim of poisoning by the Russians.

BUT WAIT!....

- ◆ What if we're spectacularly wrong?

Who Poisoned Karinna Moskalenko?

- ◆ Please use the ballots being passed out to write in your vote.
- ◆ The Russians Poisoned Moskalenko

Yes or No?

WHO POISONED KARINNA MOSKALENKO?






PERSON
ASSOCIATES, LLC



Pre-Mortem Assessment

- ◆ Were my key assumptions valid?
- ◆ Did I ignore contradictory or anomalous evidence?
- ◆ Did deception go undetected?
- ◆ How reliable was my key evidence?
- ◆ What should the absence of information tell me?
- ◆ Did I avoid common analytic pitfalls (analytic mindsets, premature closure, rational actor model, satisficing strategies, anchoring, etc.) ?

Are My Key Assumptions Valid?

- ◆ Moskalenko was a target of the Russians because of her work as a human rights lawyer.  ◆ Unsupported. There is no evidence that Russians targeted her.
- ◆ The Russians are the most likely perpetrators of the crime because they have intentionally poisoned their enemies in the past.  ◆ Unsupported. Non-Sequitur. No evidence of Russian involvement.
- ◆ This was intentional poisoning.  ◆ Unsupported. No evidence of intent; other possible explanations.

Did I Ignore Contradictory or Anomalous Evidence?

- ◆ **Mercury found in car.**

Why do this when in the past the Russians have used highly effective techniques? Mercury used in this manner is not an effective poisoning technique.

- ◆ **Timing/Discovery.**

If it's a scare tactic, she has to find it. As a preventive measure, she had to get sick at the right time to prevent her from attending the 15 October pre-trial date for the Politkovskaya case. She felt ill and went to the police two days after her husband found the mercury.

- ◆ **Headlines vs. Facts.**

Headlines read poison "fell" Moskalkenko but French officials "are cautious about the poison claims."

Did Deception Go Undetected?

- ◆ Purposeful vs. Unintentional Deception.
- ◆ Either way, it's Deception.
- ◆ Assumptions masquerading as facts can reinforce preexisting mindsets. The media said that the perpetrators were most likely Russian—speculation fueled by Moskalenko.

How Reliable Was My Key Evidence?

- ◆ Mercury in car.
- ◆ Highly Reliable.
- ◆ Moskalenko is ill.
- ◆ Highly Reliable.
- ◆ Russians did it.
- ◆ Unreliable.
Assumption
masquerading as
fact. False logic/Non-
Sequitur based on
historical precedent.

What Should the Absence of Evidence Tell Me?

- ◆ No physical evidence linking the crime to the Russians.
- ◆ There could be another perpetrator or other possible hypotheses, e.g. someone other than the Russians, accidental, self-inflicted, someone she knows.
- ◆ No other sources of information other than Moskalenko and her car.
- ◆ We need to get more information/task collection.

Did I Avoid Common Analytic Pitfalls?

- ◆ Mindset.
- ◆ Confirmation Bias.
- ◆ “Satisficing.”
- ◆ Historical Analogy.
- ◆ Russians poison people. What if this case is different? Is there an alternative hypothesis?
- ◆ We expect to see and look for evidence that confirms our mindset.
- ◆ Jumping to the first, most plausible explanation.
- ◆ Perilous “straightlining.” What has happened before is happening again.

Who Poisoned Karinna Moskalenko?

- ◆ Please use the ballots being passed out to give some explanations for how Moskalenko was poisoned.
- ◆ Place a check mark next to the most likely cause.

Who Poisoned Karinna Moskalenko?

- ◆ Polling Results vs. Final Outcome
- ◆ Only 12 days later...

The New York Times

October 28, 2008 Tuesday
Late Edition - Final

France: Mercury In Lawyer's Car Is Ruled Accidental

BYLINE: By ALAN COWELL

SECTION: Section A; Column 0; Foreign Desk; WORLD BRIEFING EUROPE; Pg. 11

LENGTH: 111 words

French investigators have concluded that mercury found in the car of a prominent Russian human rights lawyer had been accidentally spilled from a broken thermometer before the lawyer bought the vehicle, according to the police. The lawyer, Karinna Moskalenko, complained of headaches and vomiting this month, raising speculation that she had been the target of a poisoning plot. After falling ill, Ms. Moskalenko postponed a trip from Strasbourg, France, to Moscow to attend the trial of defendants in the killing of one of her best-known clients, the writer and journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was shot dead in the entrance to her Moscow apartment two years ago.



The Pre-Mortem Assessment:

THE THERMOMETER DID IT!