

The Key to Solving the Politkovskaya Case

August 30, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

Three months ago, I learned that Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov, a retired former Moscow senior police investigator who headed a surveillance unit, would be arrested and charged with organizing the murder of former Novaya Gazeta journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

I learned this from Novaya Gazeta colleagues who conducted an investigation along with the police. In fact, these journalists found the key witnesses to the crime.

It was actually Pavlyuchenkov's arrest and detention that solved the mystery of the "second surveillance ring" — the people following Politkovskaya who were Pavlyuchenkov's subordinates. They wanted to earn some quick money on the side by acting as watchouts for a criminal gang of which Pavlyuchenkov was apparently a distinguished member.

We at Novaya Gazeta believe that the gang was led by Lom-Ali Gaitukayev, the uncle of the Makhmudov brothers. Rustam, the eldest of those three brothers, has been accused by prosecutors of acting as the gunman for the group. Other group members apparently included Sergei Khadzhikurbanov, a former officer with the Moscow police's anti-mafia department;

and Federal Security Service Lieutenant Colonel Pavel Ryaguzov.

Meanwhile, Gaitukayev was jailed in connection with another murder, and the group began falling apart. Pavlyuchenkov allegedly took most of the money for the Politkovskaya murder without paying those working under him. As a result, Khadzhikurbanov seems to have blackmailed him for \$500,000.

At that point, Pavlyuchenkov apparently decided to frame his accomplices by informing investigators that he knew who had killed Politkovskaya. Of course, he did not admit to any role in the killing and said Khadzhikurbanov had approached him in early fall requesting him to track Politkovskaya. Pavlyuchenkov concluded that if Khadzhikurbanov had organized the killing, Rustam Makhmudov must have been the hit man.

Investigators began corroborating his testimony and quickly discovered that everything checked out. Records indicated that the Makhmudov brothers had made cell phone calls from the scene of the crime, Rustam's green car with a broken right windshield washer blade was an exact match to the car spotted near Politkovskaya's apartment building, and even the fiber found on the handle of the pistol that the killer had discarded was the same as the upholstery in Rustam's car.

Thus, it would seem, Pavlyuchenkov was able to put his fellow murderers behind bars and claim the \$1 million reward offered by the head of the National Reserve Bank and Novaya Gazeta co-owner Alexander Lebedev for capturing Politkovskaya's killers.

Pavlyuchenkov's role in this story has always seemed suspicious. I have written many times that the \$25,000 Pavlyuchenkov said Shamil Burayev had asked him to pass to Khadzhikurbanov was payment for Politkovskaya's murder. But I thought then that Pavlyuchenkov had refused the order and kept the money. Now, all of the evidence suggests that he kept the money and carried out the order as well.

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