Twitter Thread by Christopher Miller



Christopher Miller
@ChristopherJM



A 2012 recording of former Belarusian KGB chief suggests President Alexander Lukashenko sanctioned assassinations of opponents abroad. Specifically mentioned is Belarus-born journalist Pavel Sheremet, who was killed by a car bomb in central Kyiv, Ukraine, in July 2016.

> Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko authorised political murders in Germany in recent years, according to a bugged meeting of his former spy-chief. https://t.co/XWoiaemvuv
>
> — EUobserver (@euobs) January 4, 2021

Tape doesn't prove Belarus killed Sheremet but adds new wrinkle to unsolved case & weight to one of 3 "tracks" of investigation: organized & carried out by Russians; ...Ukrainians; ...Belarusians. Details about how KGB wanted Sheremet killed also similar to what really happened.

"We should be working Sheremet, who is a massive pain in the arse," Zaitsev said, according to the 2012 recording.

But Lukashenko's spy-chief wanted Sheremet's assassination to send a public message.

"We'll plant [a bomb] and so on and this fucking rat will be taken down in fucking pieces - legs in one direction, arms in the other direction. If everything [looks like] natural causes, it won't get into people's minds the same way," Zaitsev said.

Belarus had put Sheremet under observation in Moscow, according to an internal KGB surveillance report, which was also leaked to EUobserver.

Sheremet was later killed by a car bomb while he was in Kiev on 20 July 2016, echoing Zaitsev's macabre words.

And four years later, Ukraine has still not caught the people who did it.

Ukraine arrested and is currently trying 3 suspects in Kyiv for Sheremet's murder. All have denied involvement and much of Ukrainian civil society has sided with them. Legal experts also say authorities' case is built upon weak evidence. I wrote about it: https://t.co/QoKGO0aSz0

I've covered the Sheremet murder from day one. I wrote a lengthy investigation about it for @pressfreedom in 2016-17: https://t.co/fFr4bAJdEy I found many failings on the part of Ukrainian authorities, who made their preference clear from the beginning: that Russia was behind it.

Another investigation into Sheremet's murder by @OCCRP and @Slidstvo_info also found failings in the official investigation as well as possible links to Ukrainian security service involvement. https://t.co/b6uI6krRgm

The Belarusian "track" has been the least investigated. To some, it seemed the least plausible. Belarusian KGB doesn't have a strong track record of assassinating opponents abroad; Sheremet's citizenship was stripped years earlier; and he'd long lived in Russia and Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the new audio recording raises serious questions about Minsk's involvement in Sheremet's killing. It also puts pressure on authorities in Kyiv. Will they follow up on this lead? Or will they pursue the current, problematic case against three Ukrainian suspects?

Ukraine's National Police said in a statement today that it has the audio recording published today in its possession and will look into it. It also says that prosecutors will push ahead with the current case in court. https://t.co/0KekJD8TzW

Here's the full English transcript of the tape in which Lukashenko's KGB discusses murdering opponents abroad, published by @euobs: https://t.co/r1Xbn6LXjL