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Russia: 2 Suspects Detained In Boris Nemtsov's Murder

By JIM HEINTZ
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Russia's security service head said two suspects in the killing of leading opposition figure Boris Nemtsov have been detained, but the short and vague announcement Saturday prompted only skepticism and weak satisfaction from his comrades.

Federal Security Service director Alexander Bortnikov, in comments shown on state television, said the two suspects were from Russia's North Caucasus region, but gave no details other than their names.

He said they were "suspected of carrying out this crime," but it wasn't clear if either of the suspects was believed to have fired the shots that killed Nemtsov as he and a companion walked over a bridge near the Kremlin on Feb. 27. No charges were immediately announced.

Bortnikov didn't say where the detentions took place, how they were conducted or what led agents to the suspects. In a separate statement, the country's top investigative body praised "the reaching of the first successes in such a short period," but shed no further light. The lack of details appears likely to reinforce suspicions of the investigation's sincerity.

Nemtsov's killing shocked Russia's already beleaguered and marginalized opposition supporters. Suspicion in the opposition is high that the killing was ordered by the Kremlin in retaliation for Nemtsov's adamant criticism of President Vladimir Putin. The 55-year-old Nemtsov was working on a report about Russian military involvement in the eastern Ukraine conflict.

But Russia's top investigative body said it was investigating several possible motives, including that he was killed in an attempt to smear Putin's image. It also said it was looking into possible connections to Islamic extremism and Nemtsov's personal life.

Many believe that Nemtsov's death in a tightly secured area near the Kremlin wouldn't have been possible without official involvement, and could be an attempt to scare other government foes.

Putin, who had dubbed Nemtsov's killing a "provocation," made no comment on the detentions announced Saturday.

One of Nemtsov's closest allies in the opposition, Ilya Yashin, said on Facebook that "It's hard to judge whether these are the real performers of if the investigation went down a false track."

In any case, he said, "it's extremely important that the matter not be limited to detention of the shooters, whether these are the real killers or not. The key task is the identification and detention of who ordered" the attack.

"For the time being, it's very skimpy information, which tells us little, but it's good that the first results of the investigation has appeared," another opposition leader, former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, was quoted as telling the news agency Interfax.

In some previous killings of Kremlin critics, especially the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2006, there has been wide criticism that those who ordered the killing haven't been identified or prosecuted.

The North Caucasus region from which the suspects reportedly come includes Chechnya, where separatist rebels fought two wars against Russian forces over the past two decades and which now is in under the tight control of Kremlin-backed leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

Kadyrov has been widely criticized for brutality against opponents, including summary executions and abductions, and is a vehement defender of Putin. He blamed Western security services for Nemtsov's killing.

The suspects were identified as Anzor Gubashev and Zaur Dadaev. No further information was given about them, but opposition figures unearthed a statement from the Chechen government from 2010 in which a Zaur Dadaev was among the police troops awarded medals.

Four Chechens were among the five convicted in Politkovskaya's killing, which was widely believed to be in retaliation for her criticism of Kadyrov and Russia's actions in Chechnya.

Kremlin critics say the spiteful nationalist propaganda on state television, which cast Nemtsov and other liberals as Western stooges, helped prepare the ground for his killing.

Nemtsov was walking with a young Ukrainian woman, Anna Duritskaya, when he was shot. The woman has returned to Ukraine after questioning by police and the state news agency RIA Novosti on Saturday quoted her lawyer Vadim Prokhorov as saying she hasn't been called back to Russia for testimony in connection with the detentions.