

LETTER

MURDER IN MOSCOW

Russia and the world have lost a great and courageous journalist. The killing of Anna Politkovskaya on October 7 is horrifying and shocking, but not unexpected. As Oleg Panfilov, who runs Moscow's Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, said upon learning of her murder, "There are journalists who have this fate hanging over them. I always thought something would happen to Anya, first of all because of Chechnya."

It was "a savage crime," said former Russian President—and the father of glasnost—Mikhail Gorbachev. "It is a blow to the entire democratic, independent press. It is a grave crime against the country, against all of us."

Politkovskaya was just 48 years old when she was found in her apartment building, shot in the head with a pistol. In the last decade, her unflinching reporting on the brutality and corruption of the Chechen war made her one of the bravest of Russia's journalists.

The numerous death threats she had received in these last few years never slowed her. In fact, when she was killed Politkovskaya was at work finishing an article—to have been published Monday—about torturers in the government of the pro-Kremlin Premier of Chechnya.

Politkovskaya was a fearless chronicler of the mass executions, the torture, the rape and kidnappings of Chechen civilians at the hands of Russian troops and security forces. She understood the cancer that was the war—and wrote and spoke of how the "Bush-Blair war on terror" had given Putin allowance to say he was fighting international terrorism. In fact, the Kremlin's policies and the brutal Russian occupation of Chechnya, she wrote in many dispatches, were instead engendering the terrorists they were supposed to eliminate.

Her raw and searing reports on the human catastrophe of the Chechen war appeared primarily in *Novaya Gazeta*, which has become in these last five years the main opposition newspaper in Russia. It is to Novaya's credit that her crusading investigative articles were published inside Russia. In the wake of her death, there is concern that the next victim may be her newspaper.

Her latest book, *Putin's Russia*—an uncompromising indictment of her beloved country's corrupt politics—has just been published in the US. But it is her reporting on Russia's long-running brutal war—collected in a previous book, *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*,—which best explains what her friend Panfilov said on Saturday: "Whenever the question arose whether there is honest journalism in Russia, the first name that came to mind was Politkovskaya."

Since 1992, *forty-two* journalists in Russia have been killed—most in unsolved contract executions. Journalists—and citizens of all countries who value the importance of a free press—should join in calling on the Russian government to conduct an immediate and thorough investigation in order to

find, prosecute and bring to justice those responsible for Anna Politkovskaya's murder—and those of her colleagues.

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