

My Interview with a Putin Critic Shot Dead Near the Kremlin



In the fall of 2013, I went to Russia to report a story on the Sochi Olympics for the HBO program Real Sports.

After visiting Sochi, I went to Moscow where I interviewed a critic of the Sochi games- a man named Boris Nemtsov who was also an outspoken critic of Russia's president, Vladimir Putin.

Here's part of my conversation with Nemtsov – and his views on the Sochi games:

Boris Nemtsov: “This is a festival of corruption and mismanagement.”

HBO's Bernard Goldberg: “A festival of corruption?”

Boris Nemtsov: “This is a festival of corruption and mismanagement. We have 20 million poor people in this country.”

We have a problem in police. We have a problem in our hospitals. Putin spent \$50 billion for what? For what?"

HBO's Bernard Goldberg: "To put on a show that tells the world..."

Boris Nemtsov: "Show for himself. He's too expensive for Russian people..."

On Friday night, Boris Nemstov was shot dead on a bridge over the Moscow River, not far from the Kremlin. It was on that very bridge that I conducted part of my interview with Nemstov.

According to Reuters in Moscow, "Nemtsov, 55, was shot four times in the back, the Interior Ministry said. A police spokeswoman on the scene said he had been walking on a bridge over the Moskva River with a Ukrainian woman."

It's believed the gunman was waiting on the bridge as Nemstov walked by and escaped in a passing getaway car. No one has been arrested.

Nemtsov was scheduled to lead a protest in Moscow on Sunday against Russia's role in the war in Ukraine.

The AP in Moscow reports that, "Nemtsov was working on a report presenting evidence that he believed proved Russia's direct involvement in the separatist rebellion that erupted in eastern Ukraine last year. Ukraine and the West accuse Russia of backing the rebels with troops and sophisticated weapons. Moscow denies the accusations."

According to Reuters, "Putin condemned the killing and took the investigation under presidential command, saying it could have been a contract killing and a 'provocation' on the eve of a big opposition protest that Nemtsov had been due to lead in Moscow on Sunday."

That's one version. Here's another from Mikhail Kasyanov, a

fellow opposition leader, who told reporters at the bridge: "That a leader of the opposition could be shot beside the walls of the Kremlin is beyond imagination. There can be only one version: that he was shot for telling the truth."

Kasyanov, a former prime minister under Putin, called Nemtsov a "fighter for the truth."

Here is a link to a short segment from my Real Sports story.

President Obama, on Friday night, issued this statement on Nemtsov's murder:

"The United States condemns the brutal murder of Boris Nemtsov, and we call upon the Russian government to conduct a prompt, impartial, and transparent investigation into the circumstances of his murder and ensure that those responsible for this vicious killing are brought to justice. Nemtsov was a tireless advocate for his country, seeking for his fellow Russian citizens the rights to which all people are entitled.

I admired Nemtsov's courageous dedication to the struggle against corruption in Russia and appreciated his willingness to share his candid views with me when we met in Moscow in 2009. We offer our sincere condolences to Boris Efimovich's family, and to the Russian people, who have lost one of the most dedicated and eloquent defenders of their rights."

Later in my interview with Boris Nemstov I asked if he was worried, saying the things he told me about Putin. Here's that exchange:

BERNARD GOLDBERG: Are you at all concerned about your own wellbeing, saying these things?

BORIS NEMTSOV: Well, I was born in Russia and I will die here.

BERNARD GOLDBERG: Well, yeah, but you don't wanna die before the Olympics.

BORIS NEMTSOV: (LAUGH) I hope I survive this Olympics. I know— how risky is my job.

BERNARD GOLDBERG: You do?

BORIS NEMTSOV: Yeah, of course I know.

BERNARD GOLDBERG: And why are you telling me these things then, “festival of corruption” and “Putin’s behind it all—”

BORIS NEMTSOV: Because I know Putin.

BERNARD GOLDBERG: And you’re not worried?

BORIS NEMTSOV: I know that he’s a little bit afraid to touch me because I’m very well known throughout the world including your country.

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