

Lies and contradictions pile up on Ukraine's faked murder of Babchenko

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Six days after the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) revealed that it had staged the supposed murder of the anti-Kremlin journalist Arkady Babchenko, the Ukrainian government continues to seek to exploit the case for the anti-Russia campaign even as contradictions and lies concerning the state operation pile up. (See: “The New York Times and the murder that wasn’t”)

Last Tuesday, the Ukrainian and Western press was filled with media reports about the killing of Babchenko in Kiev. The journalist, who supported the US-backed far-right coup in Kiev in early 2014 and the war of the Kiev regime in eastern Ukraine against pro-Russian separatists, had fled Russia in early 2017 after receiving death threats.

Ukrainian officials and Western media outlets, including the *New York Times*, immediately rushed to blame the killing of Babchenko on Russia. Yet in a stunning turn of events on Wednesday, Babchenko and the head of the Ukrainian Secret Service held a press conference to announce that the murder had been staged in a “special operation” allegedly designed to disclose a murderous plot against Babchenko by the Russian secret service, the FSB.

At the press conference, Babchenko described how he had faked his fall, put on a T-shirt that had been shot through to show bullet wounds, and was then covered in pig’s blood. His wife found him lying on the floor and called the ambulance. He was pronounced dead in the ambulance and brought to a morgue where he started to watch news coverage of his alleged murder.

The story since presented by the SBU to justify the faked murder and describe the alleged Russian plot to kill Babchenko resembles a poorly written spy novel, filled with glaring inconsistencies and blatant lies.

Only two suspects have been identified by the SBU. Boris German is allegedly the man tasked by the Russian FSB to kill Babchenko. He is the executive director of the Ukrainian-German weapon manufacturer Schmeisser.

There have been reports, but no official confirmation, that he was in fact working for Ukrainian counterintelligence.

The hit man allegedly hired by German is Oleksiy Tsimbalyuk, who had previously fought in the civil war in eastern Ukraine for the fascist Right Sector on the side of the Kiev regime. No explanation has been offered for why Tsimbalyuk, by all appearance an ardent Ukrainian nationalist and opponent of Russia who has described the killing of Russian soldiers as “an act of mercy,” decided to change sides to kill Babchenko.

The Ukrainian general prosecutor, Yuriy Lutsenko, said that the staging of the murder led to the disclosure by the suspect of a list of 30 names of journalists whom Russia planned to kill in Ukraine. This number has since been revised upward, to 47. German was supposedly also tasked to stockpile secret weapons caches throughout Ukraine. How all of these plots were connected and how they were to be executed by a handful of people has not been explained.

The SBU also published as proof of Russian involvement the “dossier” the Russian FSB had allegedly compiled on Babchenko for his “killer.” Yet, as the journal *meduza* has pointed out, almost the entire biography of Babchenko in the dossier was copied from Babchenko’s Wikipedia article, while all other information had been published by Babchenko himself on various social media platforms.

The dossier included no information about Babchenko’s phone number or address in Kiev, both of which would have been important for the “killer” and easy for any secret service to obtain. The only private information in the dossier was Babchenko’s registered Moscow address and his Russian identification and passport numbers, all of which could have been (and in all likelihood were) revealed by Babchenko to the SBU, but appear to be of no immediate use to a hired killer in Ukraine.

These contradictions are in addition to more minor lies

in the Ukrainian government's account. For instance, Babchenko, in a very dramatic gesture, apologized to his wife at the press conference last Wednesday for having made her believe that he was dead. Yet on Thursday it was revealed that his wife had been in on the plot.

The Ukrainian government has not revealed whether it was aware that the killing had been faked when it declared that Russia was to blame for Babchenko's "murder."

Babchenko and the Ukrainian government have staunchly defended the media hoax and continue to seek to use it to whip up the campaign against Russia.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko hailed the staged murder as a "brilliant operation" and said on Ukraine television, "The whole world saw the real face of our enemy... It is not Ukraine you should condemn, but Russia."

He promised that Babchenko and his family would receive around-the-clock protection, arguing that "Moscow would hardly calm down" and that the Ukrainian secret services were growing stronger in "fighting Russian aggression."

The advisor to the Interior Ministry Anton Gerashchenko wrote on Facebook: "Even Sherlock Holmes successfully used the method of faking his own death to effectively investigate difficult and complicated crimes, however painful that may have been for his relatives and for Dr. Watson."

Babchenko, who worked for the Russian army in both Chechen wars in the 1990s, posted a series of vulgar and aggressive comments on Facebook to denounce his critics. In one post, he pledged "to die at 96 while dancing on Putin's grave."

Responding to criticism in the British press, he wrote: "Dear British press, will you please go fuck yourselves. If you want to do something useful, you can give me a British passport and British sanctuary. Then you will have earned the right to lecture me on how I should save myself and my family. Fucking smart arses!"

He also wrote: "I wish all these moralisers could be in the same situation—let them show their adherence to the principles of their high morals and die proudly holding their heads high without misleading the media."

Babchenko's boss at the Crimean Tatar television network ATR, Ayder Muzhdabayev, described the journalist's critics to *Al Jazeera* as "vermin." Muzhdabayev had been the first to report on Babchenko's alleged death last Tuesday.

Several pro-Western Russian journalists who are close

to the liberal opposition have published op-eds defending Babchenko. However, a few voices also raised concerns.

An editorial by Pavel Kanygin in the pro-liberal *Novaya Gazeta* argued that Babchenko had "died as a journalist by breaking professional ethics and engaging in an unprecedented collaboration with secret services." Another op-ed in the same newspaper ridiculed the operation as a "parody" on Soviet spy novels and films.

The Russian business daily *Vedomosti*, which is associated with the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote in an editorial that the Babchenko operation had "blurred the border between truth and fiction" and would lead to more distrust in the media.

Similarly, numerous opinion pieces in Western outlets such as the *Guardian* and the German *Spiegel*, which have been heavily involved in the anti-Russia and anti-Putin campaign, raised concerns about the Babchenko operation and its consequences for the credibility of the media. The *Guardian* noted that "by faking Babchenko's murder, Ukraine has smeared itself," and that it had "handed Russia a massive propaganda victory."

The *New York Times* ran an article on Sunday as an exercise in damage control that was headlined "Faked Killing of a Putin Critic Can't Get Much Murkier. And Yet It Does."

Numerous Western politicians, including German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, have also criticized how the Ukrainian government handled the case.

Their criticism of Babchenko and the Ukrainian government's media hoax has nothing to do with concern for journalistic integrity or "truth." Quite the contrary: it is motivated by a well justified fear that the crudity of this fraudulent propaganda operation will further discredit the anti-Russia campaign of the imperialist powers, in which the bulk of Western journalists and major bourgeois newspapers and media outlets are fully complicit.



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