Twitter Thread by Bellingcat

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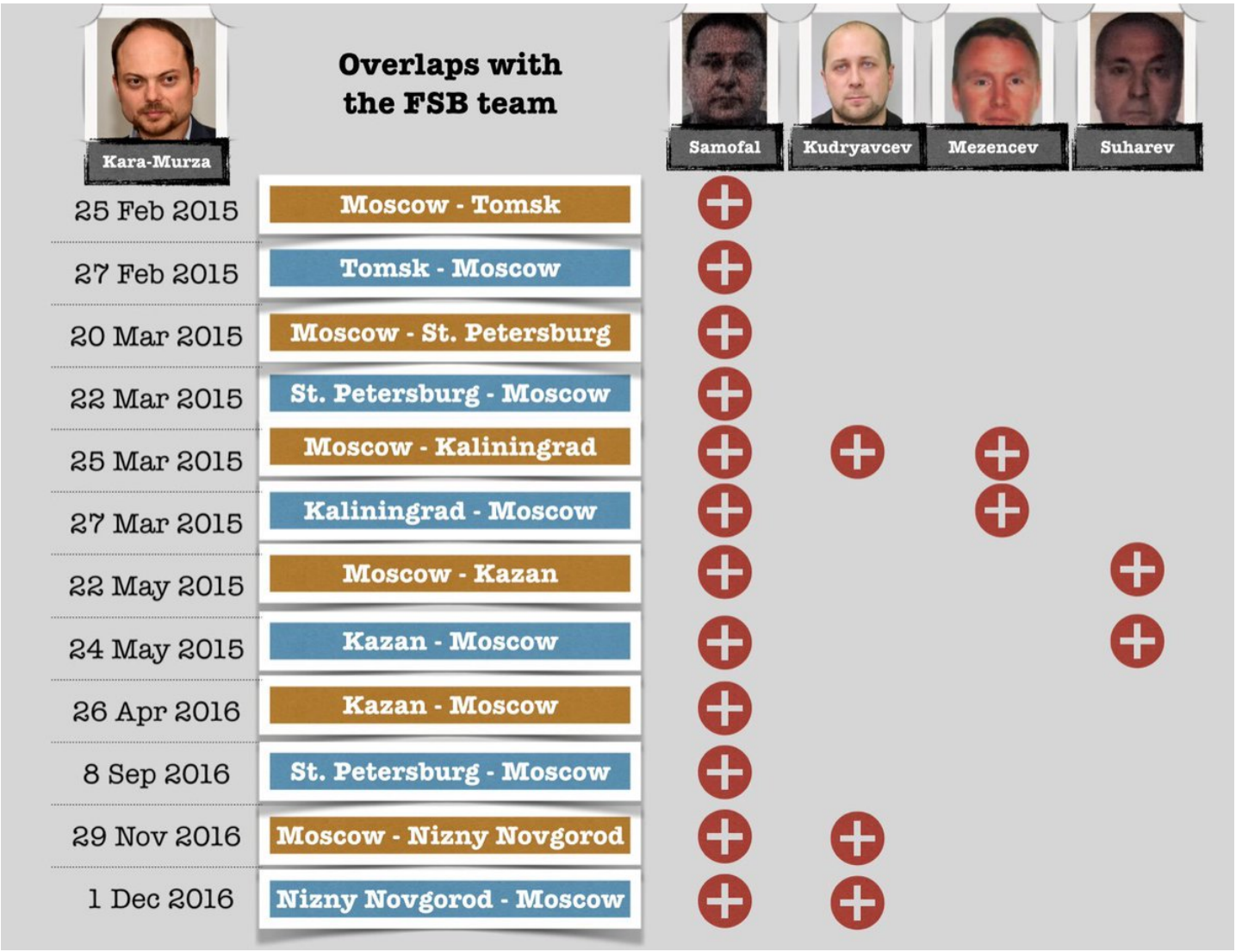
Bellingcat and its investigative partners have established that Russian politician, Vladimir Kara Murza, was followed by a specialist FSB team prior to his suspected poisonings in 2015 and 2017.

Members of the same FSB team, some of whom have medical and chemical weapons backgrounds, tailed Alexey Navalny before he was poisoned with a Novichok substance in August 2020.

Kara-Murza is a well-known Russian politician, film-maker and an outspoken critic of Russian president Vladimir Putin. The circumstances around his suspected poisonings have long remained a mystery.

Travel details of FSB team members show they followed Kara-Murza on a campaign trip outside Moscow that ended less than 48 hours before his first poisoning incident in May 2015.



Kara-Murza recovered in the US before returning to Russia. Yet the same team began tailing him again just five months after he came back. He was poisoned for the second time in February 2017.

The number of coinciding trips – seven destinations with fourteen overlapping flights or journeys – renders a coincidental overlap between the travels of Kara-Murza and FSB squad members statistically implausible.

On at least one tailing operation, FSB squad members were accompanied by a senior official from the FSB's 2nd Service, better known as the "Directorate for Protection of the Constitution and the Fight against Terorism".

This officer, Roman Mezentsev, has previously traveled on joint bookings with high-level Kremlin officials including Vladislav Surkov, President Putin's former advisor, who is long thought to have played a powerful role in Kremlin politics



Mezentsev is the highest ranking FSB officer whom we have identified on any tailing trip linked to an FSB poisoning operation.

Phone and flight records show Mezentsev frequently interacted and traveled with the chief of the directorate of the 2nd Service, Alexey Zhalo, and with other high-ranking FSB and government officials.

Mezentsev's recent phone records also show that he communicated with scientist Col. Makshakov, the deputy chief of the FSB's Criminalistics Institute and de facto chief of the FSB's poisoning program.

Another potentially relevant finding in this report is that we have tracked the earliest incident of Kara-Murza being tailed to just a few days before the assassinaiton of Boris Nemtsov near the Kremlin.

This temporal overlap, paired with the similarity in risk profile of the two political activists, raises renewed questions about whether the Russian security services may have known or had a role in Nemtsov's assassination

It must be noted, however, that the death of Nemtsov (he was murdered in a shooting) does not appear to follow the known methods of the poison squad.

Although, the FSB has been behind shooting assassinations before, such as the murder of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in 2019 https://t.co/qxxHAGG777

Kara-Murza, like Nemtsov, played a crucial role in the lobbying for and implementation of the Magnitsky Act which allows the US government to freeze assets of Rusisian and other government officials deemed to be human rights offenders

This legislation was sponsored in the US Congress by John McCain and has been a thorn in the side of the Russian leadership



Kara-Murza described to us in great detail the symptoms he felt upon becoming ill in 2015 and 2017. These included difficulty breathing, heavy perspiration, a starkly accelerated pulse and uncontrollable bouts of vomiting.

When he was poisoned for a second time in 2017, Kara-Murza's wife secured samples of his blood and, on her return to the United States, handed them to US toxicology laboratories for analysis