

Russian oppositionist Alexei Navalny flown to German hospital after doctors dispute poisoning claims

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Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny remains in a coma after falling extremely ill while traveling from Tomsk to Moscow on board an airliner. According to doctors in Omsk, Russia, the city in southwestern Siberia to which Navalny was transported after his flight made an emergency landing, their “working diagnosis” is that Navalny is suffering from a metabolic disorder possibly caused by a sharp drop in his sugar levels.

Aleksandr Murakovsky, the head doctor of the hospital’s emergency department, told the press on Thursday that neither oxybutyrates nor barbiturates were found in the body. Speaking just prior, specialists at Omsk’s BMSP-1 medical clinic and the Burdenko Institute of Neurosurgery declared they did not find poison, contradicting the charge that there was an attempt to take Navalny’s life through exposure to a lethal substance. Chemical traces from plastics that are commonly found on people’s clothes were uncovered by Russian laboratories that examined his personal belongings.

Omsk doctors had declared that Navalny’s condition was too unstable for him to be transported out of Russia. However, they have since reversed their decision. Navalny will be transferred on Saturday to the Charité hospital in Berlin on a plane dispatched by Germany to Omsk the day before, along with medical personnel.

Supporters of Navalny reject the diagnosis as a cover-up by the Kremlin, of which the oppositionist has been a vocal critic. Kira Yarmish, Navalny’s press secretary who was traveling with him when he collapsed mid-flight, insists he was poisoned while drinking tea just prior to getting on board. Anastasia Vasilyeva, head of the Doctors Alliance trade union—an outfit set up by Navalny with the intention of drawing Russian medical workers angry over the deplorable state of the country’s health

systems behind his right-wing organization—has pointed out that a metabolic disorder is not a diagnosis of an illness, but a condition brought on by some other major cause.

The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have already carried several articles insinuating—despite the absence of clear evidence so far that Navalny was even poisoned—that Russian president Vladimir Putin is responsible, and the Kremlin opponent is another victim in a long string of assassinations allegedly carried out by Moscow.

In making these claims, they are motivated solely by the ferocious US anti-Russia campaign, of which the two newspapers are the leading media proponents. They have not the slightest concern for Navalny himself. It should be noted, for instance, that both newspapers have long stopped shedding a single tear over the brutal murder of *Washington Post* columnist and critic of the Saudi government Jamal Khashoggi, whose assassination and dismemberment by Saudi operatives were recorded by Turkish intelligence.

On Thursday, White House National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien described the claims that Navalny was poisoned as “very concerning.” He added, “If the Russians were behind this ... it’s something that we’re going to factor into how we deal with the Russians going forward.” The Trump administration has since said that it is following the situation but has issued no official statement.

The European Union has yet to weigh in on the Omsk doctors’ diagnosis or the underlying causes of Navalny’s illness, limiting its intervention to appeals for the oppositionist to be sent to Germany.

Whether Navalny became ill due to natural causes or was poisoned, and if so, who might be responsible, may

never be known. Certainly, there are many people in Russia, the United States, Europe, and other countries who might wish to dispense with the Kremlin oppositionist for any number of reasons.

His fate, both in the near and short term, is entirely bound up with the Washington's aims to dominate Eurasia and the desperate efforts of the Russian ruling class to survive the consequences. The so-called Russian "opposition" movement, in which Navalny plays a central role, is a plaything within the swirling agendas of the different political forces operating in this context.

An alleged attempt on Navalny's life that is pinned to the Kremlin works to the benefit of those layers within the American state who seek to demonize the Putin government in order to justify war with Russia. The response of the *Times* and the *Post* make it clear that there is already an effort afoot to use his illness in this manner. Navalny himself has close ties to Washington.

Navalny's corruption exposés have targeted powerful individuals within the Russian state and big business. He has his supporters within the elite and the government itself, but is viewed by some as a threat, particularly within the context of the series of domestic and foreign crises currently confronting the Putin government.

The spread of COVID-19 has brought to the fore the deplorable state of Russia's healthcare system, fueling popular anger. There is an eruption of anti-government sentiment in Russia's Far East, after the Kremlin used allegations of criminal conduct to remove a popular governor. And the Lukashenko government in Belarus, Moscow's last remaining ally on its western frontier, may soon be overthrown as part of "pro-democracy" movement that has drawn behind it key sections of the working class.

Notwithstanding his free-market politics and anti-immigration chauvinism, Navalny has positioned himself as a champion of Russia's exploited medical workers and protesters in both Khabarovsk and Minsk. He is seeking to gain from the current crisis, as the Kremlin flails.

The possible downfall of the Lukashenko government, driven to a significant degree by a mass strike wave that has witnessed thousands of workers on the streets, poses dangers for the Putin government. It is terrified of the prospect that the Russian working class, which has close linguistic, cultural, economic, and political ties with the Belarusian working class, and many of the same grievances, will be moved into action by events just over the border.

It is also concerned that the Belarusian opposition, with

which Moscow has maintained close relations, could come fully under the domination of the West. On Thursday, Belarusian oppositionist Valery Tsepkalo called for Western Europe to recognize Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Lukashenko's challenger in the country's contested presidential elections, as the rightful winner.

The aim he said is to create a Venezuela-like situation, in which she, like Juan Gaidó in Venezuela, would form a competing government so that it would "become clear to the government bureaucrats and security services to whom they need to swear loyalty—to whose side they need to move."

In making this remark, Tsepkalo revealed perhaps more than he intended, as Gaidó is a tool of Washington and lacks any base of support within the Venezuelan masses. The Belarusian opposition is attempting to identify with the mass strike movement in Belarus, using its promises of "free and fair elections" to draw workers' attention away from its right-wing, free-market politics.

After initially withholding clear promises of support for Lukashenko, on Friday the Russian government signaled that it was perhaps taking a firmer position on Belarus, indicating that if asked by Minsk it would "do everything possible to help in the regulation of the situation in Belarus." The Kremlin stopped short, however, of indicating that it was prepared to fully back the besieged government. With regards to criminal charges unveiled against Belarus protesters, the Kremlin stated it would "in no way or in any way interfere in or make any appraisal of the reasons for the criminal investigations in Belarus."



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