

The death of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny

Alex Lantier, Joseph Kishore
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The death of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny in an Arctic prison on Friday has been immediately integrated into a massive anti-Russia propaganda campaign by the Biden administration and its NATO allies, along with their associated media outlets. Without an autopsy, let alone a fact-grounded analysis of the circumstances of Navalny's death, the unified position from the NATO powers is: "Putin killed Navalny."

US President Joe Biden declared on Friday that "there is no doubt that the death of Navalny is a consequence of something Putin and his thugs did."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken proclaimed that it "underscores the weakness and rot at the heart of the system that Putin has built. Russia is responsible for this."

French President Emmanuel Macron, greeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Paris to sign a military alliance and offering him hundreds of millions of euros in aid, denounced Russia. Macron stressed his "anger" and "indignation" at Navalny's death.

At the opening of the Munich Security Conference Friday, Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, was invited to speak after the news broke. She was given a standing ovation from the assembled politicians and military officers from the NATO countries as she declared that, if news of Navalny's death were true, "I want Putin, his entire entourage, Putin's friends, his government to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family, to my husband."

Amidst this propaganda offensive, it is first necessary to stress that there is no precise knowledge as to how Navalny died. Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service reported that Navalny lost consciousness after a walk, and efforts to revive him were not successful. Navalny,

according to these reports, may have died of a blood clot.

This would not absolve the Russian government of culpability. Navalny died in a Russian prison, and the Putin regime was responsible for his well-being and safety. This, however, does not warrant the claim, in the absence of evidence, that Navalny was murdered.

Therefore, it is necessary to reject the claim that is being made of his death by the imperialist governments.

One element of the propaganda campaign is the glorification of the deceased. Alexei Navalny was a "champion of democracy," declared the *Washington Post* editorial board. "The greatest advocate for Russian democracy is dead," ran an opinion piece in the *British Telegraph*. The *Atlantic Council*, which is closely connected to the US State Department, proclaimed that Navalny's "martyrdom" will "magnify [his] moral leadership immeasurably."

Navalny, however, was not a representative of a "democratic" faction of the Russian political system. He entered politics on the far right, joining the free market Yabloko party and its Union of Right Forces in 2000. In 2007, he co-founded the National Russian Liberation Movement, an anti-immigrant chauvinist outfit. In 2021, Amnesty International temporarily stripped Navalny of the designation it had given him as a "prisoner of conscience," for advocating racial killings of people from Central Asia and the Caucasus, whom he once referred to as "cockroaches."

Only after he entered into opposition to Putin did Navalny decide, for political reasons to find another more politically palatable basis, to choose the all-purpose banner of "anti-corruption."

In the context of the bitter conflicts within the Russian oligarchy, Navalny represented a faction of

Russia's capitalist oligarchy that wants closer relations with the United States. Even in prison, Navalny still exerted sufficient support within the oligarchy to allow him to have regular access to social media.

If Navalny was murdered, there are many possible suspects, including some agency of the Russian state, acting with or without Putin's knowledge. In recent months, the Kremlin has attacked many opposition figures, even if they had no short-term prospects in next month's presidential elections. It has arrested Pabloite journalist Boris Kagarlitsky and Stalinist candidate Sergei Udaltsov, and barred the pro-NATO liberal Boris Nadezhdin from running.

However, one would have to ask: Why would Putin take action against Navalny now? The Russian president has been working to ingratiate himself with a faction of the political establishment in the United States. His recent interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson was devoted largely to pleading for a negotiated settlement over the war in Ukraine. In the aftermath of the interview, Putin went out of his way to praise Biden, saying he would prefer his election to that of Trump.

If it were foul play, there are others who could be responsible, including factional opponents of Putin who see Navalny's death as helpful for their own cause.

All of this, however, is entirely speculative. More important is how it is being used by the US and NATO powers, above all, the Biden administration, to intensify the campaign for an escalation of the war against Russia.

The immediate demand from the Biden administration, the Democrats and sections of the Republican Party is for the passage by Congress of a bill containing tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky himself has seized on Navalny's death to call for more military assistance, amidst an intensifying crisis of the far-right government, which has been bled white by the imperialist-backed war against Russia.

Here, what is most striking is the staggering hypocrisy of the imperialist powers. Biden and his NATO allies furiously denounce the Putin regime's treatment of Navalny, while subjecting Julian Assange, a genuine champion of human rights, to the most brutal and life-threatening conditions.

Assange has been kept in Belmarsh Prison, in

southeastern London, under conditions that the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture described as "ill treatment, arbitrary detention and what could amount to psychological torture." He was the subject of assassination plots orchestrated by the CIA. He has been systematically denied medical care and the ability to communicate, even with his lawyers. And next week he has a hearing that could decide his final appeal against extradition to the United States.

And what of the many prisoners still rotting in Guantanamo Bay, after decades of brutal detention and torture?

Biden cannot contain himself over the death of Navalny, and yet he is overseeing, arming, financially supporting and continuing to defend mass murder carried out by Israel. Those praising Navalny's memory are political criminals whose invocations of morality deserve nothing but contempt. They are indignant at the alleged murder of Navalny, while arming the Israeli armed forces for the genocidal campaign against defenseless men, women and children huddled in hospitals, bombed-out homes and tent cities across Gaza.

The only purpose of the propaganda campaign over Navalny's death is to justify the further escalation of war against Russia.



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