

US intelligence agencies say Putin “didn’t order” murder of Alexei Navalny, Wall Street Journal reports

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US intelligence agencies believe that Vladimir Putin “didn’t order” the killing of Russian oppositionist Alexei Navalny, who died in an Arctic prison on February 16. The revelation, published by the *Wall Street Journal* in late April, came from undisclosed sources within the CIA, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the State Department and is “broadly accepted” within these institutions.

According to the WSJ, “The U.S. assessment is based on a range of information, including some classified intelligence, and an analysis of public facts, such as the timing of Navalny’s death and how it overshadowed Putin’s re-election.”

Indeed, the forces that have benefited the most so far from the oppositionist’s end are not the Kremlin, but its right-wing critics, the White House and NATO, all of whom immediately blamed Moscow when Navalny died and used it to whip up anti-Russian sentiment. With the war against Russia in Ukraine resulting in little more than failed “counteroffensives,” massive body counts and societies on both sides of the Atlantic increasingly disgusted by violence, Washington and its allies seized upon Navalny’s death this winter to try to breathe new life into their fight for “democracy” in Russia.

They are now working to elevate his widow, Yulia Navalnaya, as the heir to his legacy. *Time* magazine included her in its just-published list of the 100 most influential people of 2024. The blurb written about her was authored by Vice President Kamala Harris. Germany’s news network Deutsche Welle, as well as the country’s prestigious Ludwig Erhard Summit, recently each announced that Navalnaya will receive their annual “freedom” prize.

Neither the White House nor the agencies cited by the *Wall Street Journal* have responded to the newspaper’s

revelation. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, both of which play a leading role in promoting the anti-Russian line in the mass media, buried the news and failed to report on it. Political commentators in Europe dismissed it. Slawomir Debski, director of the government-funded Polish Institute of International Affairs, declared that “Putin was personally invested in [Navalny’s] fate,” such that “the chances for this kind of unintended death is low.”

The WSJ article has provoked sharp denunciations from Navalny’s supporters within the Russian opposition. Leonid Volkov, a central figure in the Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) founded by Navalny, said those who arrived at the conclusion “clearly do not understand anything about how modern day’s Russia runs.” “The idea of Putin being not informed and not approving killing Navalny is ridiculous,” he added. However, he did not declare that the newspaper’s account of what US intelligence officials said was false.

From the moment the news broke that the Russian oppositionist had collapsed in a prison yard in western Siberia, the FBK has been insisting that the head of the Kremlin masterminded his death. This claim is an essential element of their false characterization of Navalny, what he represented and the political movement of which they are now jockeying for control. According to them, the Russian oppositionist had a broad base of popular support, was beloved by millions and was the personification of democratic values. Because he was all of these things, Putin *had* to kill him and *did* kill him.

But their depiction of Navalny—a far-right, pro-market Russian nationalist who allied with fascists, celebrated the importance of doing so and commanded no popular support outside well-to-do layers in the major cities—was complete nonsense, and so was their alleged “proof” of

Putin's involvement.

In February, Maria Pevchikh, the head of the FBK (an organization that refuses to make public information about its funding sources) released a well-made, seven-minute YouTube video in which she declared that "Navalny was everything that Putin could never be" and "he hated him for it." In answer to the rhetorical question as to why the Kremlin leader had to kill him precisely now, she says that she knows "the answer" and has "not the slightest reason or desire to hide it."

Pevchikh, who is expertly done-up, claims that Putin acted in order to stop a prisoner exchange secured by her organization through strong-arming Western politicians. This was done, she declares in an effort to impress the viewer, with the aid of "the wealthiest people on the planet." In return for Navalny, the Kremlin was to get Vadim Krasikov, a Russian imprisoned in Berlin on charges of carrying out a murder at the behest of Moscow. Instead, according to her, Putin, having decided, "I just need to get rid of that bargaining chip," had Navalny killed. This was his solution to the fact that he did not want to continue with the prisoner swap.

Leaving aside the puffing up of the FBK as some sort of influential organization capable of telling Western governments what to do (as opposed to vice versa), this makes no sense. Any prisoner exchange agreed to by the Russian government could only have been executed with the president's prior approval. If Putin did not want to release Navalny, he simply would not have agreed to the swap. One does not kill off one's own "bargaining chips." One removes them from the table and puts them in one's pocket.

Clearly aware of her unconvincing logic, Pevchikh admits Putin's actions were "absolutely irrational." She leaves it at that, however, and this is the sum total of the proof that the Russian president killed Navalny.

The WSJ's revelation that multiple US intelligence agencies have determined that Putin did not order the murder of his critic come as news reports indicate that the Russian opposition is riven by various divisions. While powerful layers within the US ruling class have, at least for the moment, thrown their public support behind Navalny's widow, there are many other contenders for the prize of America's leading stooge in Moscow.

The *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* have both recently carried articles about the tensions among these layers, a theme which the *Financial Times* also took up last year. Ex-Russian billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky, right-wing former chess champion Garry

Kasparov, Kiev-based Ilya Ponomaryov, Israeli-based social media personality Maxim Katz, Yulia Navalnaya, FBK-personnel Leonid Volkov and Maria Pevchikh and others inside and outside of Russia are all vying for the role of leader of the opposition.

In a March 19 article, the *New York Times* lamented the "insularity" of the oppositionists grouped around the FBK, the back-and-forth squabbling between them and other Kremlin critics and the fact that the organization was unable to turn out more than a few dozen people to a demonstration called to commemorate Navalny's death outside the Russian embassy in Vilnius.

But, whatever the differences within the various layers of the anti-Putin forces, they all share, as these recent news articles made clear, a few things in common—unabashedly pro-market policies, hatred of the Russian working class and a commitment to the US-NATO effort to break up and dominate Russia. None of them enjoy significant support in the Russian masses.

An April 17 *Wall Street Journal* article titled, "Infighting Divides Russian Opposition in Exile," noted, "Most opposition figures do agree on a twofold strategy: first, to gradually sow discontent inside Russia and maintain the support of the 10% to 20% of Russians they estimate to be disillusioned with the Russian president; second, to seize on any unrest inside Russia and turn it into a street movement or rally around whichever protest leader comes to the fore."

According to the newspaper, oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky put the matter succinctly, stating, "I'm ready to back the devil if he helps destabilize this regime." Anticipating a split in the Putin-regime elites, Khodorkovsky declared, "You need to back one group of bad guys against another." Such are Russia's great fighters for "democracy."



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