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One Flew Over the Kremlin's Nest

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I confess that I have been thinking for a long time about the collective looney bin that best describes Russia's leaders. I mean loony bin in the direct sense — when our leaders, suffering from real delirium, utter complete nonsense.

Take, for example, the in absentia conviction last week of Alexander Poteyev, former deputy head of the "S" department of the Foreign Intelligence Service who oversaw sleeper agents. In the verdict written by the judge, Poteyev betrayed Anna Chapman and the other sleeper agents working in the United States.

But in the material released by U.S. prosecutors after the Russian agents were arrested, it was clear that they had been followed by U.S. investigators for 10 years — and without any help from Poteyev.

Another example: Berkan Yashar, a Turkish politician and ethnic Chechen — and "former CIA agent," according to Channel One — gave an interview to the channel on May 17 in which he said Osama bin Laden died in Chechnya in 2006, long before the Americans claimed they killed him in Pakistan.

What is even more strange was President Dmitry Medvedev's comment on Yashar's statement: "If this is true, the whole world will shudder." Did Medvedev really think that there was any possibility — even the slightest — that Yashar's statement was true?

The last thing that threw me into shock and awe was an interview conducted by Russian Reporter magazine with Sergei Karnaukhov, a former deputy governor of the Kirov region, who was bragging that he is the chief organizer of the criminal case against whistleblower Alexei Navalny.

This interview is fascinating. It starts with the statement that Karnaukhov "after 10 years of working for [Russian] intelligence was introduced to [Kirov Governor] Nikita Belykh." It ends with a dramatic description of Navalny's escape from Kirov, where "men with handcuffs" were already waiting for him.

Of course, when reading the interview and seeing that Karnaukhov himself was explaining how he tried to put Navalny behind bars because he thought Navalny was an "American agent," my first thought was: "What an idiot!"

But the more you read the text, the more you get the feeling that none of this even happened. There was no group of people with handcuffs waiting in front of Navalny's office. Can you imagine the scandal this would have created?

The most accurate characterization of Karnaukhov is from Belykh, who said he is imbalanced and often "eccentric" during staff meetings. Belykh's adviser, Maria Gaidar, put it more bluntly, calling Karnaukhov an "absolute psycho."

Karnaukhov, formerly an assistant to Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev, was sent to Kirov to bring order to the region, because he said he had important connections and that he would put everyone behind bars. But he was later shipped off to Kaliningrad because it turned out that he had no connections at all and couldn't put anyone behind bars.

The real question is why did the Kremlin fall for Karnaukhov, just like Medvedev fell for Yashar?

As I said, the Kremlin is a looney bin.

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