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Kremlin Sadists Are Torturing Navalny

By Yulia Latynina

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Many are wondering why Navalny was convicted last Thursday, taken into custody and then released pending his appeal the very next day.

Was it really the protesters who closed down Tverskaya Ulitsa that forced the authorities to do it? No, the prosecutor filed the motion for his release many hours before protests even began. Or did the U.S. White House cite the negative international reaction and pressure President Vladimir Putin into letting Navalny walk free? Of course not. Washington is far more interested in the fate of former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.

The real reason Navalny was released was to torture him.

The entire decision-making process in Russia is paralyzed. Putin alone makes all the major decisions, and nobody but Putin had the authority to release Navalny. Putin has always humiliated his worst enemies and rivals. And once they are properly humiliated, it is easier to remove them from the picture forever.

Recall the proceedings against former Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Throughout the first trial, the authorities hinted to him that if he would only apologize, he would receive a suspended sentence. Next, they hinted that if he admitted guilt and asked for mercy, he could possibly receive a pardon. Again, the goal was to humiliate him. Khodorkovsky refused both proposals out of principle.

The same thing is happening with Navalny. Throughout his trial over recent months, the authorities repeatedly gave him the choice of asking for mercy. He was told that if he would only admit he was wrong, he might be pardoned — "might" being the key word here.

"Don't participate in the Moscow mayoral election," Navalny was told. "Just tell everyone that you couldn't collect the required number of signatures from municipal deputies to run for office. After all, almost all of them are from United Russia, which you consider the 'party of crooks and thieves.' It makes perfect sense that they would not endorse your candidacy."

And then comes the sadistic part of the latest twist in the Navalny affair. The victim has already felt steel handcuffs on his wrists, spent a sleepless night in the cold, damp 2-square-meter prison cell, thinking to himself that this will be his home for the next five years.

And then, the next morning, he is yanked back from the abyss into the light of day to once again take a gulp of freedom. "What do you say now, Navalny? Still planning to criticize the authorities?"

One current Russian multi-billionaire decided that he would never test fate or the Russian authorities after he spent a couple of nights in jail. "Never again," he told himself. "Under no circumstances will I ever do anything again that could result in my loss of freedom." He often tells this story. He probably told it to Putin.

In the end, I think that Putin himself decided to imprison and then immediately release Navalny. In his distorted world in which an entire flock of Siberian cranes follows him and even U.S. President Barack Obama will wait 30 minutes to see him, such a move makes perfect sense.

The problem is that Navalny lives in a completely different world.

Yulia Latynina hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvy radio.

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