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Navalny's Orange Revolutionary Plans for Russia

By Sergei Markov

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Opposition candidate Alexei Navalny isn't so much a candidate for Moscow mayor as he is a candidate to become a Russian version of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko.

The sentencing and immediate freeing of Navalny pending appeal led to heated speculation that there was a sharp split among the Kremlin elite, but that was just wishful thinking. There is no split; there is only a difference in objectives. The first objective is to increase the legitimacy of the Sept. 8 mayoral election by including Navalny. The second objective is to prosecute someone guilty of embezzlement.

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Why is there such a fuss over Navalny anyway? Perhaps it is because he is a politician of a new generation of Russians. Up until now, most of President Vladimir Putin's critics have come from the past, and both journalists and voters have long grown tired of them. The new face of Navalny is attractive if only for his political novelty. Navalny also attracts active Internet users and the socially active middle class. That's why many observers see a bright political future for Navalny.

In reality, voters are paying attention not so much to Navalny's politics as to his business of fighting corruption. Navalny's top anti-corruption project, Rospil, has become a genuine trademark, and he has targeted political heavyweights who are members of Putin's inner circle. All of this puts Navalny at center stage. During the protests that took place in December 2011 and throughout 2012, Navalny positioned himself as a talented orator who could easily manipulate a crowd and as a cult figure of the protest movement.

Navalny's heroic return to Moscow's Yaroslavsky Station after receiving his five-year sentence gave a tremendous boost to his political career. Who else does the opposition movement have to support other than Navalny? It seems that he has become their poster child. They sincerely believe that his five-year sentence was the Kremlin's revenge for Navalny's own anti-corruption campaign. There is a strong likelihood that Navalny may become a "teflon" politician, just like former President Boris Yeltsin was in his day.

At the same, however, many of Navalny's closest colleagues in the opposition movement have difficulty understanding him. Many are suspicious of the circumstances that brought him into the spotlight. Some even think that Navalny is another Kremlin project with the aim of keeping the opposition under control.

There is another strange thing about Navalny, He is the only Russian nationalist to be supported by such prominent outspoken liberals as Yevgenia Albats, the editor-in-chief of the New Times and Garry Kasparov, a frequent opinion-page contributor to The Wall Street Journal. Albats, Kasparov and Sergei Guriev, the former rector of the New Economic School, recommended Navalny for the World Fellows program at Yale University. Being accepted in such a prestigious program is commendable, but combining Russian nationalism with a seemingly liberal political platform is a strange mix.

The other factor that is concerning is that all Color Revolutions combined populism, charisma and, most notably, support from the West.

My theory is simple: Navalny is a bright politician who was chosen by members of the anti-Putin elite who are linked to global oligarchy. While Navalny was at Yale in 2010, he underwent training for his future role as an opposition leader. And he did not disappoint his patrons, who are surely proud of the heights he has attained.

Navalny is preparing to become a Russian Yushchenko. His task is to organize large protests and overthrow Putin. This explains why fervent opponents of xenophobia and nationalism from The New Times, Novaya Gazeta and Ekho Moskvy pretend not to notice Navalny's racist statements.

The more I analyze Navalny's past, the more I become convinced that Navalny is the Russian Yushchenko. The leading members of his campaign team, Leonid Volkov and Vladimir Ashurkov, claim that they left their jobs at a Luxembourg investment fund and Alfa Group, respectively, to devote their lives to what they call "democratic revolution and social justice." Few are fooled by their claims. Volkov and Ashkurov never left their world of global finance. They are just contractors hired by Navalny earning even more money on the side.

Navalny is a blogger. What kind of profession is that? They get money for publishing incriminating material.

Take, for example, Navalny's Rospil project. Why did it work for Navalny while similar attempts by others failed? Because other bloggers sat by themselves doing all the work, while Navalny had money to hire helpers to dig up the things that would later go under his brand. And where did his financing for Rospil and his other projects come from? Did thousands of average citizens really send in 500 rubles ($15) each to support Navalny's foundation? You would have to be very naive to believe that. In reality, Navalny is much more likely to receive his financing from an oligarch.

And Rospil is likely to have been the brainchild of Hermitage Capital CEO Bill Browder. It is one of his tools to take revenge on Putin and his friends using the well-trained and well-financed Navalny. Navalny is reminiscent of Yeltsin, whom Russia fell in love with initially in the early 1990s, although he was responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the impoverishment of millions of Russians. Twenty years ago, Yeltsin infected the country with an aggressive virus.

But I am sure that Russians can stop Navalny's virus from spreading and crippling the country. We have the antibodies to fight this disease, which was developed in special laboratories in the West.

Sergei Markov is vice rector of Plekhanov Economic University in Moscow.

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