

Russian Security Chief Snubs Navalny's Debate Challenge

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Viktor Zolotov / Kremlin.ru

The head of Russia's National Guard troops has turned down opposition leader Alexei Navalny's invitation to a televised debate, urging him instead to participate in a "sports competition."

Viktor Zolotov, a former presidential bodyguard, challenged Navalny to a duel last month in retaliation to the activist's video exposés of alleged corruption in the National Guard. In a YouTube [video](#) published Thursday, Navalny said he accepted Zolotov's challenge and proposed holding a live "verbal duel" on state television.

Related article: [Navalny Accepts Putin Ex-Bodyguard's Duel Challenge](#)

"Debates? I invited him to something else," the state-run TASS news agency cited the head of the National Guard as [saying](#) Friday.

“I’ve been accused of allegedly inviting him in order to beat him up after he called me corrupt,” Zolotov said. “But the thing is that there’s currently a court case going on, so we’ll see afterward whether he was right or not... and then we’ll return to this question.”

It was unclear what court hearing Zolotov was referring to, but the Mediazona news website [reported](#) that the firm mentioned in Navalny’s investigation had filed a lawsuit against the Kremlin critic earlier in October.

Zolotov was seated next to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov in a video of the interview [published](#) by the Life tabloid. Zolotov is heard saying in the video: “I invited him to a sports competition, nothing more.”

Navalny seized on the official’s use of the phrase “sports competition,” [tweeting](#): “I clearly remember the word ‘duel’ being used” in the Sept. 11 invitation.

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