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Arrested Pro-War Nationalist Girkin Is a 'Political Prisoner,' Navalny Says

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Igor Girkin (Strelkov) pictured in court. **Press service of the Meshchansky District Court / Moskva News Agency**

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Tuesday that pro-war nationalist Igor Girkin, who was arrested last week on extremism charges, should be recognized as a political prisoner.

Girkin, a Russian army veteran and ex-FSB officer also known as Igor Strelkov, was arrested last Friday on charges of "public incitement of extremist activity." The move was seen by many as retaliation for his vocal criticism of Russia's leadership and their handling of the war in Ukraine.

"Igor Strelkov was detained illegally. As long as he remains in custody on this ridiculous and obviously politically motivated charge, he is a political prisoner," Navalny said in a Telegram post.

Girkin's arrest came days after he called on President Vladimir Putin to step down and accused the Defense Ministry of failing to achieve results in Ukraine.

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“Now Strelkov is arrested not on charges of committing a real crime, but on a fictitious and fabricated case of extremism,” Navalny continued. “Basically, for criticizing the authorities. And specifically [Defense Minister Sergei] Shoigu and Putin.”

“Regardless of the views of Strelkov, we must stand on the positions of law and justice. A person can only be judged for the crime he committed. To gloat that Strelkov fell victim to his own power is to publicly support lawlessness,” he added.

Girkin had helped Moscow annex Crimea and organize pro-Russian separatist militias in eastern Ukraine in 2014. He then served as the military commander of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic.

In November 2022, he was sentenced to life in prison in absentia by a court in The Hague for the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014, killing 298 people.

Navalny, who has spoken out against the invasion of Ukraine, is serving a nine-year prison sentence on charges he and his supporters deem to be politically motivated. The longtime Putin foe is currently facing an additional 20 years on a string of new “extremism” charges.

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