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Disagreements between Navalny and Khodorkovsky – differences in methods or in ideology?



The recent very peculiar confrontation involving Alexei Navalny's team against Mikhail Khodorkovsky might indicate that domestic tensions within Russia are on the rise.

Both Khodorkovsky and Navalny are prominent Russian opposition representatives whose opinions are valuable to understand not only Russia's post-war future, but also to understand how to bring Russia closer to ending the war against Ukraine.

Navalny is a political prisoner and should be freed. This is regardless of his earlier statements that "Crimea is not a sandwich to be returned to Ukraine", or "Don't send weapons to Ukraine", as he said in an interview with the Washington Post in 2015.

Just recently Navalny said 'cooperating with Rostislav Murzagulov, former PR manager of Radiy Khabirov, a former head of the Bashkortostan Republic of the Russian Federation on my behalf, created a post with the very aggressive title, "I am ashamed of Khodorkovsky".'

Navalny's accusations against Khodorkovsky appear to have some hidden agenda because they are based on twisted facts.

Questionable initiative

Such an aggressive statement is very compromising for Navalny 'cooperated with Alfa Bank throughout the years of their opposition activities in Russia and also with Vladimir Ashurkov, the former Alfa Bank manager. Just recently, Navalny's team signed a petition asking to remove Alfa Bank shareholders from the sanctions list. Alfa Bank personnel are considerably more involved in

questionable actions by the Kremlin than Murzagulov..

Alexei Navalny has always been an authoritative and uncompromising leader of the Russian opposition, not interested in cooperation and affiliation with other opposition leaders who refused to accept his dominance.

Navalny made a huge leap into Russian public opposition as an anti-corruption ideologist, and started his public journey from the so-called nationalist "Russian (Russki) marches".

Navalny sacrificed a lot for his political career. It is quite understandable why he wants to remain the undisputed leader of the Russian opposition, and views Khodorkovsky's growing dominance as a threat to his leadership and influence within the Russian opposition.

We don't want a Maidan in Moscow

In the past, however, Navalny was willing to compromise with the regime. Just before his campaign for Moscow started 'after he was

unexpectedly released from prison in 2013, during one of his public speeches, he said that citizens of Moscow didn't need a Maidan, and that Moscow was their city anyway.

By Maidan, Navalny meant public protest similar to the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2005 on Maidan Square in Kyiv. The Kremlin was furious about any Maidan in Moscow.

Before 2014, when the Russian repressive machine was not even close to today's Stalinist

measures, it was common for Russian and Moscow protesters to call for Maidan in Moscow. Probably those were the last days when Maidan, a passionate street protest in Moscow, was still hypothetically possible.

Since then, Russian repressive measures have been getting increasingly draconian by the day. Many street protesters have been sentenced and even killed.

Those who were killed were not famous, like Boris Nemtsov. They were unknown and not publicly not exposed. Moscow street protesters such as Sergey Mokhnatkin, for example, was tortured and had his spine broken whilst in prison. Mokhnatkin did not die behind prison bars, having been released due to his severe injuries.

What is the reason for the conflict?

During those days, both Khodorkovsky and Navalny held different positions. While both agreed on the need for all opposition forces to unite, they disagreed on how to cooperate with the former regime's supporters.

Khodorkovsky agreed to collaborate with any current regime supporters who denounced the war and were willing to contribute to its quick ending on Ukraine's terms, and within 1991 borders.

Navalny seems similarly willing to embrace the 1991 border concept, but is not willing to collaborate with any regime supporters.

For example, Navalny's

this is quite understandable.

Not only does he have firm political ambitions which will remain only a dream unless some

powerful forces from today's leading Russian hierarchy decide to challenge Putin, which would automatically secure them key roles in a post-Putin Russia.

This is also because Navalny is inclined to avoid any Russian heavyweights with whom he has not cooperated in the past, as he did with Mikhail Fridman and other Alfa Bank personnel.

Khodorkovsky, unlike Navalny, does not intertwine changes in Russia with his political career in a future Russia. Khodorkovsky is a manager, not an opposition politician like Navalny.

Khodorkovsky appears to be more dedicated to the overall cause, which is to change Russia, as opposed to Navalny, to whom advancement of his brand and influence is important because of his political ambitions.

Long missed chances for change

The chance to implement changes in Russia from within during people's protests was wasted in 2010-2013. Ironically, this was when Navalny ran for mayor of Moscow.

Since then, the Russian opposition has been severely purged and controlled by the Kremlin. There are no alternative political forces in Russia capable of challenging Putin's grip.

Only unhappy members of the current Russian elite, suffering from sanctions and limitations, have any real possibility of removing Putin.

Therefore, the approach adopted by Khodorkovsky is not only more realistic, but

far more achievable than the potential of the forces Navalny is capable of using.

Khodorkovsky knows many, if not most, people in today's Russian elite. He understands how they think and what they are capable of. He probably still has some clandestine forces and influence in Russia he can utilise, both in Moscow and Russia.

The fact that he has been cooperating with people from the Republic of Bashkortostan could also indicate he understands that Russian imperialism could be deployed against Russia itself, by raising anti-imperial sentiments among formerly subverted ethnic republics within the Russian Federation.

A Russian prison is a horrible and dangerous place that damages health or kills people, as in ~~Sergei Magnitsky~~ 'Sergei Magnitsky'.

A Russian prison kills a person from within. It damages a person's soul. People there can make decisions or even alliances which they would have refrained from if they were free.

Because of Navalny's popularity in the West, he can easily be influenced or manipulated by forces inside the Kremlin.

How will Putin's elite behave?

Traitors around Putin have a better chance of extending their hand to someone such as Khodorkovsky, while there is no practical purpose for them to lean upon someone already imprisoned by the regime.

Navalny and all other political prisoners and hostages must be released. There is no question about it. To achieve that, the West must explore the vulnerabilities of Putin's regime.

During the continuing fiasco on the Ukrainian frontline and the unrest among Russian elites who have ended up being strangled by Putin, the initiative by Khodorkovsky to extend his hand to all those in the Russian establishment who are against the war, support Ukrainian borders within 1991 arrangement, and have not been involved in war crimes, is indeed the most feasible way to defeat Putinism.

This is the only way to stop Russian aggression against Ukraine and clandestine soft power Russian aggression against many other countries around the globe, including the United States.

The average Russian person is too scared or brainwashed to do something tangible about Putin's regime.

Capable and powerful Russian elite members are probably the best force to crash Putinism from the inside and stop the war.