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Becoming Navalny

NARRA  KOBALT

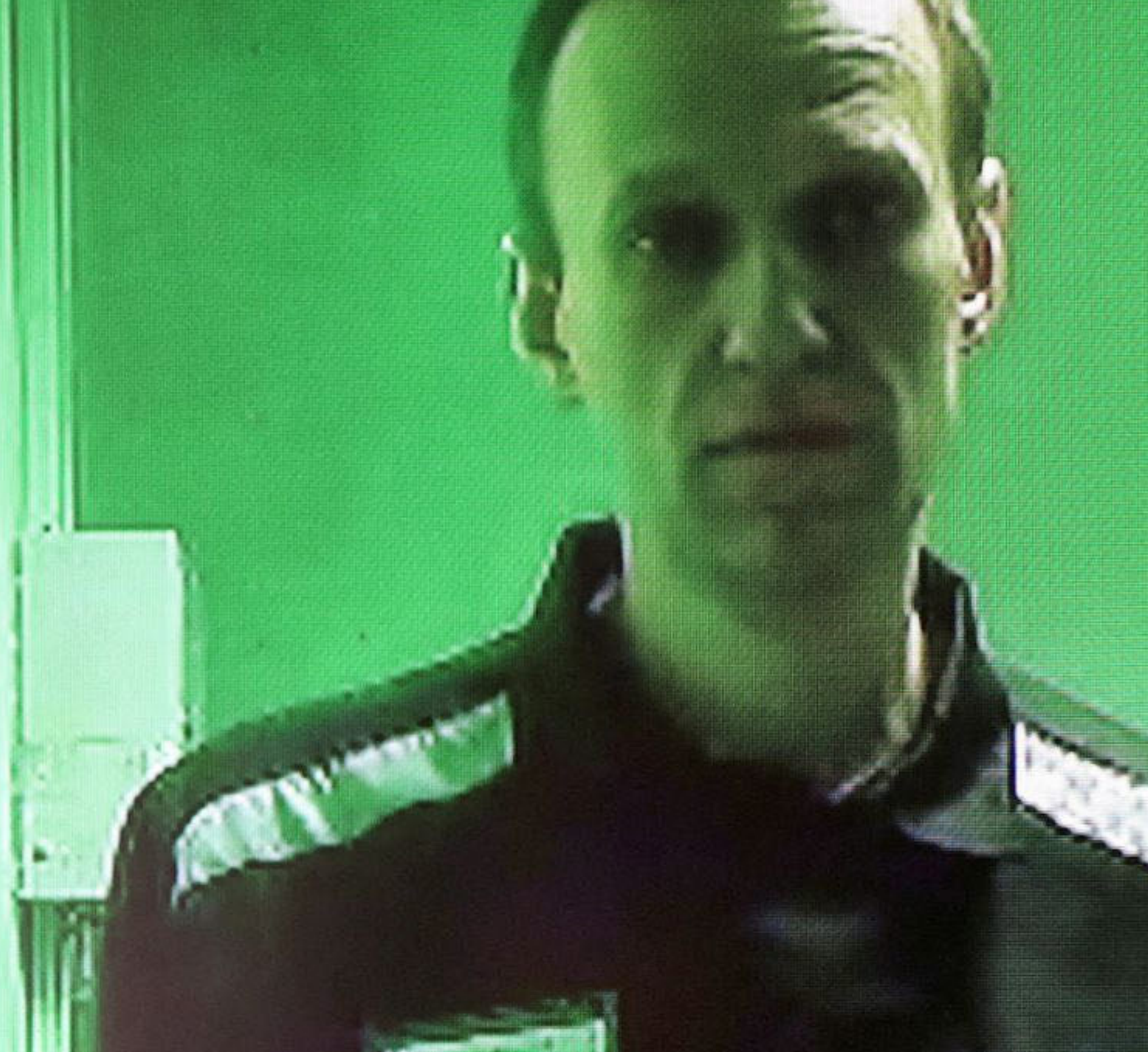
Putin's Enemy #1

Isolated in prison for nine years and tortured 24/7, Alexei Navalny remains the most famous Russian politician after Vladimir Putin. Many refer to him as the 'Russian Nelson Mandela' and predict him winning a Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2023 the *Navalny* documentary produced by CNN and HBO won a BAFTA and Oscar awards. Navalny's story continued right at the ceremony when his family sent him their love and support.



Today we can barely see Navalny himself — and, like on this court live stream, just pixelised and glitchy



Everybody knows the story of Alexei Navalny after August 20, 2020, when FSB (ex-KGB) officers poisoned him with chemical weapons, but he miraculously survived, came back to Russia and got in jail.



That day, that flight.
Police officer entering the plane.
Ambulance on the runway.

Photos by Ilya Ageev. He witnessed it all — and talked to us recalling that day.

But how did he come to this point?

We know how.

We have been real-time following Alexei Navalny since 2005.

We talked to dozens of his friends, allies and witnesses who don't really do interviews.

We collected footage and photos never published before.

We visited places one can barely visit anymore.

We have the whole story.

**We want to tell it as a miniseries or as a feature documentary.
And we are looking for a partner.**

Now the story.

Soldier's Son





We got into a restricted-access military town, where Navalny was born and where his parents still live. We found the house where he grew up and visited his school — nothing has really changed there since his childhood. Most of the people here are afraid to even mention his name, but we did our magic and talked to his school principal and family buddy.

The whole area around Navalny's hometown is military land, including a polygon for bizarre „tank biathlon“ and hallucinogenic Russian army temple with fresco of Putin.





We went to Ukraine to find a place where Navalny spent most of his summer vacations as a child. In contrast to Russia, no one was afraid to speak here. Nove Zalissya is Navalny's ancestral village: his father was born here and most of the residents still have the same last name.

In March 2022, Illya Navalny from Nove Zalissya was murdered by Russian troops during the infamous Bucha massacre — reportedly just because of his last name.





The Democrat



We accidentally started following and filming Navalny in 2005, as he was working in the youth wing of Yabloko ('Apple'), a Russian minor democratic party. Inspired by the first Maidan protests in Ukraine, Navalny started organizing the demos against Putin's regime. We got access to Yabloko party archives, showing the first steps of 30-year-old Navalny as a politician.





We met Maria Gaidar, who for a long time was not just Navalny's political ally, but closest friend. This is quite unlikely: Navalny's best friends are his wife and children. Together they tried to provoke change in Russia through street protests. Later both joined the team of governor of Kirov region — struggling to change the politics from inside of Putin's administrative mechanism.

Maria's father Egor Gaidar was first post-soviet prime minister who introduced shock therapy reforms. His controversial legacy influenced almost every Russian politician — including Navalny.

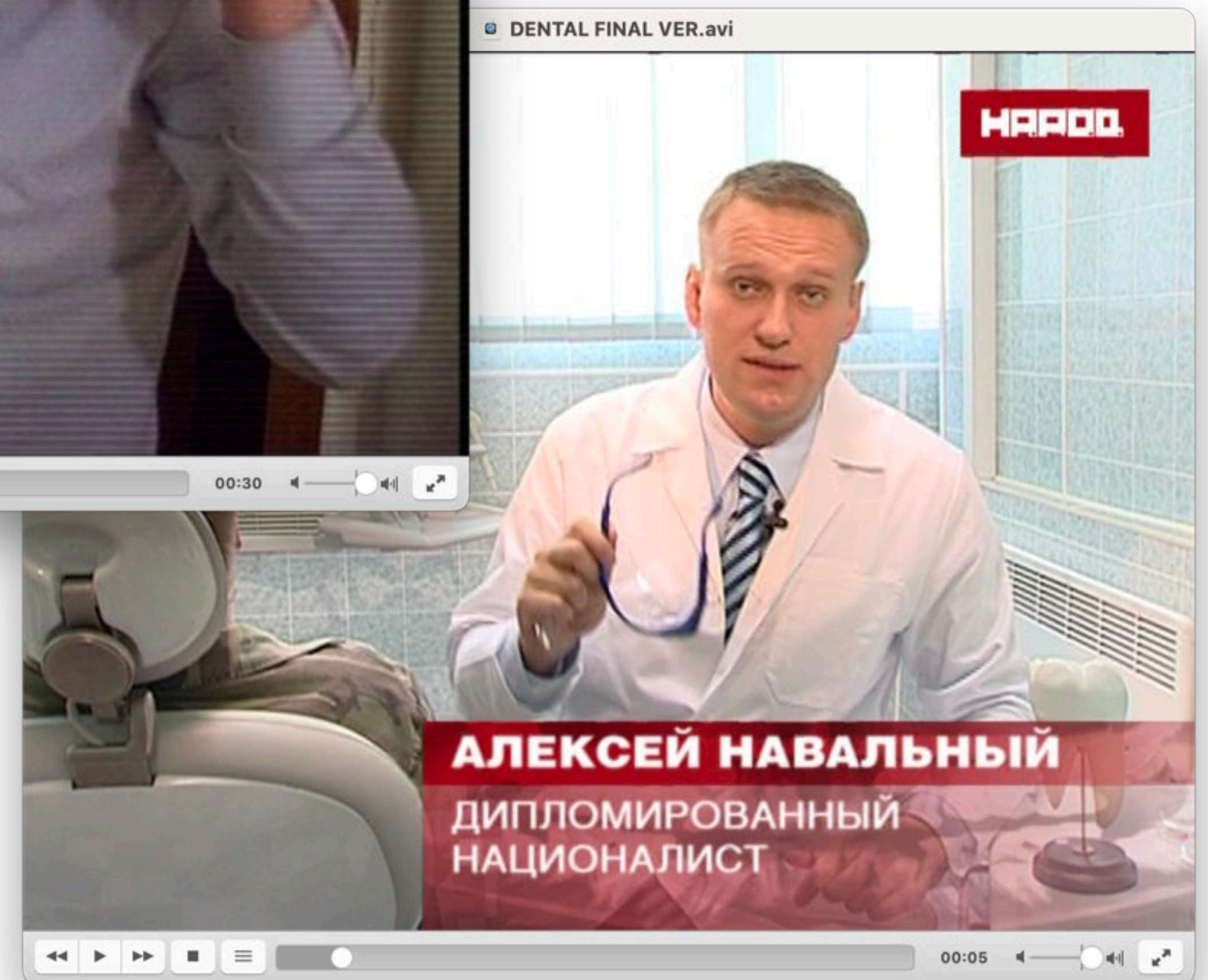




The Nationalist



We found out what was happening behind the scenes of Navalny's openly xenophobic videos: he was sitting in the dentist's chair and comparing illegal migrants to cavities in teeth. Seeing the opportunity in the nationalist movement, he started speaking out with harsh nationalist rhetoric and participating in the „Russian marches“. Until now it remains the most controversial and shocking episode in his political career.



Stills from Navalny's video director's cut. The title says he's a "certified nationalist".



This period, including calling Georgian citizens „rodents“ and shouting the radical ultra-rightists’ slogan „Glory to Russia“, haunts Navalny to this day.

One of his best right-wing allies, Alexander Potkin, was later locked behind the bars by Putin’s regime. Since then, he’s not really talking about his political experience. But made for us an exception.

The Investigator



After almost ten years experimenting with political messages and audiences, Navalny finally invented his own silver bullet. Because Russian media wouldn't cover him, Navalny built his own alternative Youtube network that told the whole country about corruption in the highest echelons, whether it was the family of the attorney general, the prime minister, or Putin himself.



Putin's palace. History of world's largest bribe

126M views • 2 years ago



Don't call him "Dimon"

46M views • 5 years ago

We talked to the mastermind behind his first investigative pieces — who never really went on camera before.



The Challenger



Navalny's leadership as a corruption investigator #1 led to major political success. In 2013 he took second place in the Moscow mayoral elections, receiving almost 30 percent of the vote.

In 2018, having no chances to be officially registered, he started a presidential campaign to declare himself as an alternative to Putin. Sensing a threat, Putin decided to fight him with criminal cases, police, paramilitary and FSB.

Russian propaganda sells its audience the picture of Navalny as a person financed by the US State Department. Actually, there is a person who systematically finances Navalny's political activity: for the first time, he went on cam telling us about this.

Boris Zimin is one of the biggest Russian philanthropes. For years, he was financing educational and pop-sci projects, making a massive impact on Russian science. Inspired by Navalny's approach, Zimin started financing him directly. Now he's on the *Wanted* list in Russia. This is how his official mugshot looks like:



Дата рождения 24.11.1968

Основание для розыска: разыскивается по статье УК

Установочные данные:
пол: МУЖ,
национальность: РУССКИЙ,
дата рождения: 24.11.1968,
место рождения: РФ, , Г.МОСКВА,
особые приметы:

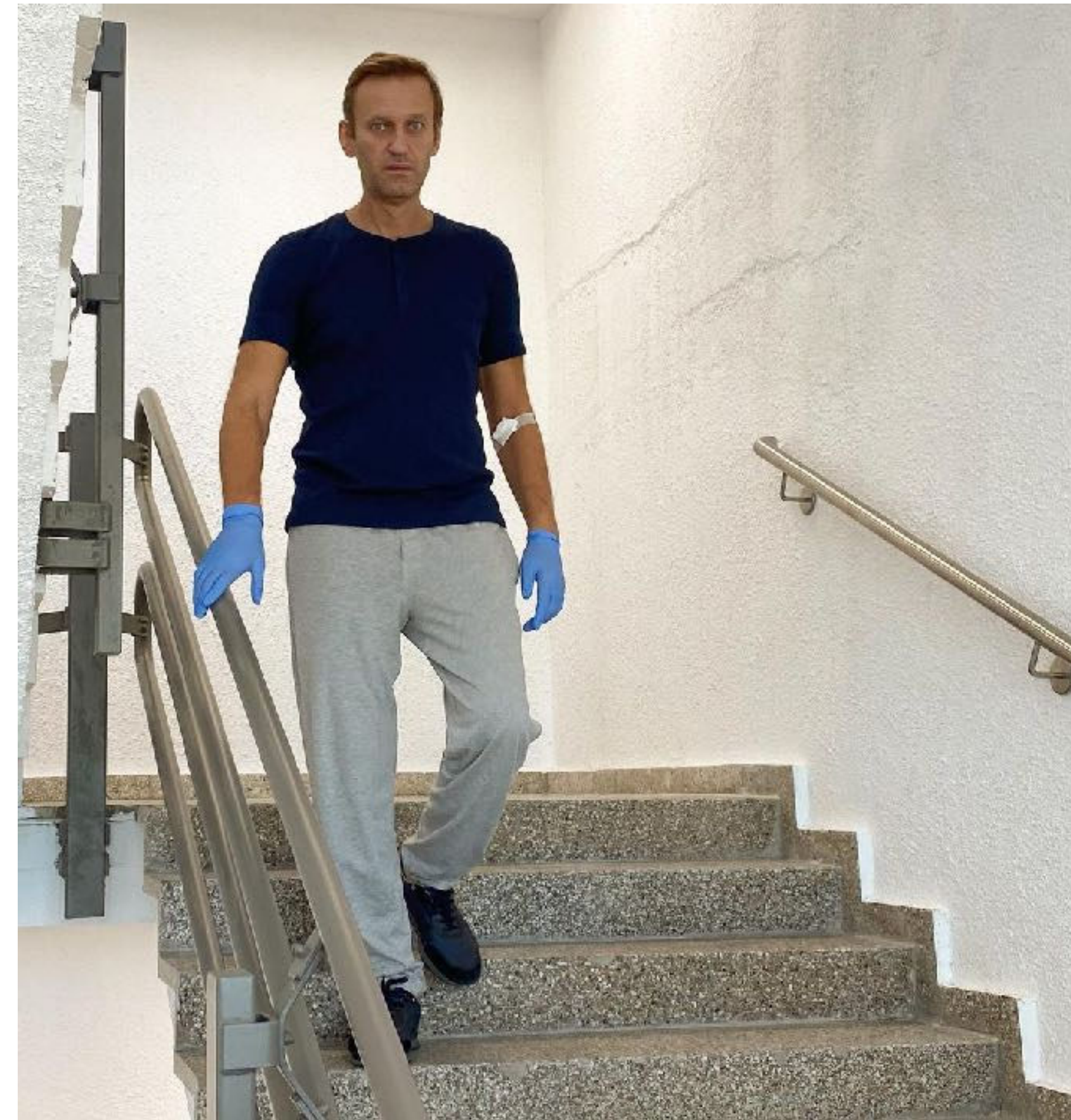




Still direct and charismatic, by 2020 it was a strong feeling that Navalny is losing it. He sank in Trump-like attacks on the last Russian independent media, refusal to be interviewed, Twitter fights with journalists, and evasion of his past.

Tatiana Lysova, an icon of Russian independent journalism, and her underage daughter were among bullied by Navalny's clackers who acted like anonymous image board trolls.

But on August 20, 2020 he was murdered. The rest is history.



But there is even bigger story behind this.

His tough way as a politician explains us how Russian Empire works.

Presidents worldwide are not the same. The President of the US is one of the most powerful persons in the world. On the contrary, the German President's role is mostly symbolic.

Russia became a so-called *super presidential republic* in 1993 when President Yeltsin attacked an opposing parliament with tanks. The tanks were from Alexei Navalny's hometown.



17 y.o. Navalny witnessed this crisis. It was the first time he was interested in politics.

Since then all Russian presidents have been playing tough guys, constantly delimiting their power. The President of Russia lives in the Kremlin, he's not a manager but Tsar, he's a man not a woman, and his will is over the law, both domestic and international. The whole world experiences it now.

As the opposition leader, Navalny inherited this tough guy DNA. His approach is: *a coalition under our flag – or no coalition at all.*

This helped him to build really effective opposition structures. But Navalny was constantly blamed for his hard political style – and made a lot of enemies. During the biggest anti-Putin protests in 2011, a lot of people were shocked with his loud and radical way of public speaking.



By 2018, Vladimir Putin made his way to the bloody autocrat. Challenging him, Navalny was climbing to the top of the political system where everyone in post-soviet history ended as an autocrat. He was stopped just by Putin's secret police – to become someone else. Now not a challenger, but mortar.

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