

I started working with Alexey Navalny as his press secretary in early 2012. Since then, hardly a day went by without me hearing Alexey state that one of the most important measures to stop Putin is imposing sanctions on his corrupt inner circle.

In March 2014, the NYT published an op-ed titled '[How to Punish Putin](#)', authored by Navalny. At the risk of exacerbating conditions of his house arrest, Alexey did his best to warn the West that sanctioning non-influential figures with no major assets in response to Putin's invasion in Crimea, will not change Russia's policy. And most likely to be construed as a sign of weakness and encouragement to Putin and his entourage. So, he:

1. Called for western sanctions primarily to target Putin's inner circle and his wallets, by freezing oligarchs' assets and seizing property.
2. Insisted on hitting the oligarchs whose media outlets parrot the propaganda lines and targeting Putin's entire "war cabinet": the TV spin doctors, compliant Duma members especially those of the United Russia Party.
3. Stressed Western authorities must investigate ill-gotten gains from Russia within their jurisdictions.

As of April 2022, eight years later and over a month into a full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, we can all agree Navalny was right. Those exact measures have now been implemented: most of the oligarchs named in the op-ed were sanctioned; and a multilateral Task which includes Task Force KleptoCapture in the US investigates ill-gotten gains from Russia in western jurisdictions.

But none of that will bring back the victims of the atrocious war in Ukraine or mitigate the colossal cost this war will have for Ukraine and for the world. This war could possibly have been prevented had these sanctions been imposed in 2014, just like Alexey recommended. It would have demonstrated the West's resolve and might. It would have acted as a deterrent.

Putin's corruption kills. Literally. It's not a figure of speech, it never was. Alexey Navalny and his team have been saying it for over a decade. It is tragic that it takes FSB agents poisoning Navalny with a novichok nerve agent and him almost dying from it, his subsequent imprisonment, and the outlawing of the opposition movement in Russia for this message to be heard loud and clear.

It is even more tragic that it took a total invasion of Ukraine and deaths of thousands of innocent civilians for the West to finally ACT with strength when the message had been clear for so long. I am confident at this point all of us agree that we are paying a terrible price for not acting sooner. For not sending Putin the only kind of message he understands. Yet now is no time to regret, but to act to prevent further atrocities.

So, I will quote Alexey Navalny's letter from few days ago: "Sanctions work. There is a split in Putin's elites and it's our job to exacerbate and enhance it" and repeat the words Leonid Volkov said in these very walls in November 2021: let's fight this fight together. No matter what Russian elites or propagandists are trying to signal out of fear and despair – they are, for a fact, terrified and in despair. And that's a good place to start. Hundreds of Russia's richest and powerful people are at risk of losing or have already lost their way of life, and no matter if they admit it or not, that makes them realize what Putin is costing them. But let me warn you to be persistent, ruthless, and rapid on this path.

Sanctioning corrupt politicians, oligarchs, and their family members along with enablers, proxies and nominal owners of assets is the most straightforward way to make them suffer as beneficiaries and supporters of Putin's regime. Extended family members are the key here, but I need you to understand that's not what most people think when they hear "extended family".

Let me explain and start with the war criminal Vladimir Putin. My colleagues' brilliant investigation of his palace proved: on paper Putin owns next to nothing but he has a distributed wealth system centrally

managed and funded by state-owned enterprises and oligarchs' donations. The legal owners of various assets that are believed to belong to him – we're talking company shares, mansions, luxurious apartments in Russia and internationally, yachts, planes, helicopters, limos, the list goes on – are bound to Putin by ties of family and patronage. They include Putin's relatives of various degrees of remoteness, endless in-laws, and vassals who he allows to run companies dependent upon the state. A normal person would have a finite number of members of extended family, but it's not the case for Putin who has at least three families. Two daughters with his ex-wife Lyudmila; long established partnership with Alina Kabaeva; and a daughter with his mistress Svetlana Krivonogikh. All these people, their relatives, as well as dozens of Putin's remote relatives benefit from the regime he established and nominally hold his assets. Therefore, without sanctioning ALL these people you're letting Putin off the hook.

And as I said, it's not just Putin's families, Putin's corrupt wealth management system includes the members of his security council, the oligarchs, and all his closest team members. Multiple investigations led by our team and fellow independent media teams uncovered similar informal organizations that involve friend oligarchs, relatives, second and third families, mistresses, and their relatives. Defense Minister Shoigu, Foreign Minister Lavrov, Moscow Mayor Sobyenin are just the tip of the iceberg. They all hold things for Putin and their extended families hold things for them. The same logic must be implemented with Putin's friends: childhood friends, the KGB and his St. Petersburg Mayor's office colleagues who have been given huge fortunes and have distributed networks consisting of their relatives. Identifying and sanctioning these people is important if we truly want to stop Putin's elite from enjoying a luxurious lifestyle in the West while supporting war crimes in Ukraine. And we must stop this because this is much of what they care about and therefore an important way to create dissent in Putin's ranks.

Even smaller caliber Putin's team members have those corrupt wealth networks: Deputy Prime Minister Trutnev, Deputy Mayor Liksutov and many more. They may be personally sanctioned, but their actual wealth structure allows them to keep assets and their family members to use them. The West needs to target the business groups surrounding these functionaries: not all of them might support Putin's passion for geopolitics, but all of them share his passion for luxury and they must be held accountable for supporting him. Uncovering the hidden gears of Putin's corruption vehicle is a tough investigative job, requiring time and effort. Yet over the decade of Anti-Corruption Foundation investigations as well as the work of our independent media colleagues proves that it can be done by small teams of dedicated enthusiasts. So, it's a good thing we've already done this job and we are happy to share our findings.

Last, but not least; this inhuman war would not have been possible to wage if it was not for the sophisticated propaganda machine Putin built over two decades of his ruling. The faces of propaganda might not possess wealth comparable to oligarchs but some of them hold significant assets abroad, and these are the people directly responsible for the war crimes in Ukraine. Without their lies Putin would have no support for his war. The CEOs of Russian State TV channels Konstantin Ernst and Roman Dobrodeev, head of the Russia Today Network Margarita Simonyan, anchors Dmitry Kiselev and Vladimir Solovyev – I will not bother you with names, but the list goes on. Do you know what unites those individuals apart from the fact that they have innocent Ukrainian blood on their hands?

None of them are under sanctions in the USA. Over a month into war, Mariupol massacre and Bucha bloodbath, they can still enjoy spring break in Miami or take their kids to Disneyland. They can also own property here and keep their money safe.

These people are the backbone of Putin's regime, personally responsible for its atrocities – let's make the world never forget who they are and what they've done and let's not let them use their blood money. That means personal sanctions against propagandists and their families, and debilitation of their technology. Putin relies on his control of the Russian public via the law enforcement, censorship, and propaganda powers. Let's weaken those by preventing his regime from access to any technology that can be used for

propaganda purposes or for identifying and prosecuting freedom fighters. There is no more free media in Russia, so no more exports of broadcasting equipment, media technologies or services that can benefit propaganda to Russia.

To conclude my opening word, I would like to quote Alexey Navalny's public address to Russian people:

"We must, gritting our teeth and overcoming fear, come out and demand an end to the war. Each arrested person must be replaced by two newcomers. If in order to stop the war we have to fill prisons and paddy wagons with ourselves, we will fill prisons and paddy wagons with ourselves. Everything has a price, and now, in the spring of 2022, we must pay this price (and protest). There's no one to do it for us. Let's not "be against the war." Let's fight against the war."

Let me remind this comes from a man, who's spent more than a year behind bars in the hands of the very same people who tried to kill him in August 2020 and with no guarantee they won't attempt to kill him again. He just had his sentence increased from 2.5 to 9 years and he is still calling on Russians to oppose the war and on the West to sanction Putin's base. With every incentive not to stir the pot this man has not changed his tune. He never will.

Alexey Navalny and all of us on his team have no illusions: he's term is a life term. His or Putin's.

*Carthago delenda est.* Let's fight this fight together. Thank you.