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RUSSIA

Russian Police Raid Navalny's Office Over Critical Video

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Russian police have raided the office of opposition politician Aleksei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) in Moscow, a step he claims is an attempt to disrupt the publication of a damning investigation against the head of Russia's second-largest bank.

Masked officers in helmets belonging to the Federal Bailiffs Service covered the cameras outside FBK's office on December 26 around noon local time before cutting through the door with power tools and dragging out Navalny, the opposition politician [said on social media](#). He was not detained.

Navalny said the raid was formally carried out as part of a criminal investigation against FBK's director, Ivan Zhdannov, for failing to delete the YouTube video Don't Call Him Dimon, an investigation into the secret wealth of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

However, he said he believed the raid could be tied to FBK's recent investigation into Andrei Kostin, the CEO of VTB, a state-owned lender that required a massive government bailout earlier this decade.

In a YouTube video posted earlier this month, Navalny accused Kostin of bestowing gifts bought with taxpayer money -- including a mansion and yacht -- on his girlfriend. Kostin has denied the accusations. The video has already garnered more than [5 million views](#).

Navalny said the December 26 raid came as FBK was putting the final touches on a follow-up YouTube video about Kostin and VTB. FBK had planned to post it at 1 p.m. local time, he said.

Though the video was "not quite done, not quite edited," he said he decided to still post it to let Kostin and other targets of his investigations know that "they can't stop us," he [said](#) outside the FBK office as two masked officers stood behind him.

The masked officers took 17 notebooks, all the servers, switches, cameras, and camera lighting used to produce the YouTube channel Navalny Live, according to Leonid Volkov, an aide to Navalny.

They also searched the dropped ceiling and later left the office with wires dangling from the damaged tile ceilings.

Powerful Investigations

Navalny's investigations usually combine publicly available government data -- such as company registration documents and property records -- with social-media posts to try and prove high-ranking Russian officials secretly own assets that cannot be explained by their salaries.

By far his most popular video, Don't Call Him Dima has garnered nearly 33 million views since it was published in March 2017.

Navalny, who narrated the video, accused Medvedev of using an array of charity and nonprofit organizations to collect donations from oligarchs and state banks and then redirecting the funds to [purchase pricey assets](#).

Medvedev dismissed the video at the time as "propaganda."

The investigation alleged that Alisher Usmanov, a billionaire with deep connections in Russia's ruling elite, donated a property in the wealthy Rublyovka village outside Moscow worth 5 billion rubles (\$85 million) to a nonprofit fund for state social projects reportedly led by two former university classmates of Medvedev.

Usmanov has also rejected the allegations made in the video.

Navalny **said** on December 26 amid the raid that the Medvedev video "will not be deleted under any pressure."

The raid is the latest attack by the state against Navalny and members of his organization, who led a wave of protests this summer against the government, the largest in years.

On December 24, a Moscow court fined FBK lawyer Lyubov Sobol the equivalent of \$16,000 for repeating offenses related to rules on staging public events.

The fine relates to opposition rallies she organized in August to demand free and fair elections after she was barred from running in Moscow City Duma elections in September.

On December 23, Ruslan Shaveddinov, a project manager for FBK, was detained in his Moscow apartment and sent to serve his mandatory military duty on Novaya Zemlya, a remote air-defense base in the Arctic Ocean, some 5,600 kilometers from Moscow.

Service in Russia's military is mandatory for most male citizens, who are drafted for one year after turning 18 and before reaching the age of 28. New conscripts are often subject to brutal hazing and bullying by more senior soldiers, so many young men try to avoid service by all available means.

Navalny blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for Shaveddinov's seizure and deportation to the distant location.

With reporting by Lenta.ru and AFP

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