

Weekly Intelligence Brief

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Russian political opposition leader Alexei Navalny dies in Arctic prison

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On 16 FEB, the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service announced that Alexei Anatolievich Navalny was found dead in the IK-3 Russian penal colony in the town of Kharp. IK-3 was built on the grounds of a former Soviet forced labor camp and currently holds over 1,000 prisoners with convictions ranging from murder and rape to Navalny's extremism charges. While reports say that Navalny's family was told cardiac arrest and a blood clot caused the death, US President Joe

Biden said in a statement that there is "no doubt" Vladimir Putin is to blame.

Navalny was previously poisoned with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok in AUG 2020. He recovered in Germany before returning to Russia to continue speaking out against Putin's rule. In 2021, Navalny was convicted on extremism charges and sentenced to 19 years in prison. In late 2023 he was moved from Penal Colony 6 outside of Moscow to IK-3. Navalny's team believed this was preemptive of Russia's upcoming presidential elections in March, where Putin is expected to win re-election. Other political opposition candidates, intelligence officers, journalists, and

dissidents have been imprisoned or killed at the presumed hand of the Kremlin. In response to Navalny's death, crowds gathered in Russian cities in memorial and to protest the Kremlin's authoritarian rule. Reports say that over 100 of these protestors have been arrested.

We can assess with moderate confidence that the Russian government was likely involved in the death of Alexei Navalny. We can also assess with high confidence that Russian citizens are very likely to continue gathering and protesting until after the March elections.

Ukraine's new army chief known as "The Butcher"

Lex Martin

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On 13 FEB, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appointed Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi the new commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Over the past week, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has fired most of his top generals in an attempt to reset the management of the country's decimated, undermanned, and undersupplied armed forces. Dr. Mikolay Mitrokhin of Germany's Bremen University, who has been writing detailed analyses of the Russia-Ukraine war since the beginning of the conflict, noted that it is a part of

Zelenskyy's style to fire those who failed at their work and are a part of the wrong generation or team. Zelenskyy's decision to fire many officials shows that he only wants those in command who provide successful results. The only top officers who have kept their jobs are those who have commanded successful operations against the Russians in the Black Sea and some heads of the Air Force and air defense.

The new commander-in-chief, Syrskyi, is referred to by some as "The Butcher" due to his little regard for the loss of human life. He has been credited with two significant successes, one being the defense of Kyiv in February and March 2022, when tens of thousands

of Russian soldiers tried to encircle the capital from the north.

We can assess with moderate confidence that it is highly likely the new commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi, could be what Ukraine needs to stop the Russian invasion as the war approaches the two-year anniversary on 24 FEB.



Russian nuclear-related anti-satellite weapon in development

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On 15 FEB, National Security Council Spokesman, John Kirby, addressed concerns surrounding Russia's capability to deploy a nuclear-based weapon in space that is designed to target satellites orbiting the planet and could deteriorate a nation's communications and targeting systems. Spokesman Kirby stated the weapon is not currently operational. Two US officials stated the weapon is nuclear-armed, not nuclear-powered. Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on

Intelligence, Michael Turner, requested for President Biden to declassify all information on this issue, claiming it could help the administration work with Congress and US allies on how to handle the possible deployment of the anti-satellite weapon. The Kremlin claimed the United States was attempting to draw support for more aid to Ukraine with this issue, however, Kirby refuted the Kremlin's statement.

How the weapon would deteriorate or destroy satellites is unknown, raising the question of whether it could target specific nations' satellites or if it would indiscriminately destroy all satellites in an area. The effectiveness of nuclear

weapons against satellites has been questioned by critics since the shockwave associated with nuclear weapons on Earth would not be a factor in space. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 bans the stationing and use of nuclear weapons in space but damaging another nation's satellite systems is not forbidden.

It can be stated with high confidence, that Russia is highly likely to continue developing this weapon, and it is likely the United States will attempt to thwart this development through diplomatic options.

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