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putin's many 'heart attacks' and why the rumours may be in his favour

Численні «серцеві напади» путіна і чому чутки можуть бути на його користь

Головна репортерка «The Independent» Холлі Еванс інформує про російський telegram-канал "Генерал СВР", який вперше з'явився у 2020 році під керівництвом колишніх співробітників Служби зовнішньої розвідки росії, і відомий тим, що часто публікує сумнівні заяви про погане здоров'я путіна. Незважаючи на необґрунтовані та сумнівні твердження, вони часто потрапляють у заголовки таблоїдів у всьому світі. У розмові з «The Independent» директор програм Росії та Євразії в Chatham House Джеймс Ніксі сказав, що цей конкретний канал має досвід поширення дезінформації та перебуває на службі російської держави. Кремлю вигідно сіяти сум'яття. На думку Д. Ніксі, хоча здоров'я путіна знаходилося під пильною увагою перед його вторгненням в Україну в 2022 році, часто згадка про нього в пресі є продуктом прийняття бажаного за дійсне.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-health-update-massive-heart-attack-b2435507.html>

The Kremlin have been forced to deny the recent speculation that the ageing tyrant had suffered a cardiac arrest and collapsed in his bedroom

For years, the health of Vladimir Putin has been the subject of lurid speculation and rumours. Recent reports have included body doubles, secret chemotherapy, Parkinsons disease and claims that he fell down the stairs, landed on his coccyx and soiled himself.

Yet this week, the most drastic rumour of ill health began to circulate about the 71-year-old. According to shadowy sources, members of his security service were alerted to banging from his private bedroom, only to discover him convulsing on the ground.

Food and drinks were allegedly overturned, with doctors rushing to perform resuscitation while the news of his supposed cardiac arrest caused panic amongst his inner circle.

Responding to the claims, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters it was an “absurd hoax”, and that everything was well with the Russian president.

The sensational story, which has been covered by several Western media outlets, first appeared on the mysterious Telegram channel General SVR.

Known for frequently posting dubious claims about Putin's ill health, it first emerged in 2020 claiming to be run by former members of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and other state bodies.

Despite its unevidenced and dubious claims, they frequently make tabloid headlines across the globe, with one expert stating that the account has proven itself “useful” to the Russian regime.

Speaking to The Independent, James Nixey, the director of Russia-Eurasia programmes at Chatham House, said: “What is absolutely clear is that this particular channel has a record of putting out disinformation and that is in the service of the Russian state. It suits the Kremlin to sow confusion.”

While Putin's health had come under scrutiny before his 2022 invasion of Ukraine, its frequent mention in the press is the product of "wishful" thinking, Mr Nixey said.

"71 years old is the average life expectancy of Russian men," he added. "He is not the average man. He'll have much better healthcare than anyone else and he appears not to be a heavy drinker compared to his predecessors.

"I think it's safe to assume he's in reasonably good health for a 71-year-old male," he said.

While figures such as a Russian academic and a Ukrainian lawyer have been linked to the General SVR, a spokesperson for the channel previously declined to identify the account's sources.

Dismissing the prospect that information on Putin's health was being leaked from inside the Kremlin, historian Dr Mark Geolotti said: "The idea that someone is so deeply entrenched in his inner circle and hasn't now been picked up by Russian counterintelligence is infinitesimal.

"Putin's inner circle is such a black box, most of the time we don't even know where he is in Russia let alone about his health."

Speculation around Putin has not been limited to his health, with stories emerging of his deep paranoia and fear of Covid-19. Bizarre pictures show the tyrant sitting metres away from his guests, while media outlets have claimed that he resides in underground bunkers and requires visitors to pass through a special tunnel of ultraviolet light.

One of the many consistent rumours surrounding the ageing tyrant is his use of body doubles. For those familiar with Putin's paranoia and isolated approach, his appearance over the summer in Dagestan where he was seen interacting with an enthusiastic crowd was viewed as remarkably unusual.

In a rare venture from the confines of his secure offices and homes, he was seen clasping the hands of well-wishers and was even seen kissing a girl on the cheek.

Despite never greeting his security team over the course of his two decades in power, he shook hands and adjusted the uniform of an officer, sparking rumours that his fans were in fact fawning over a body double.

Those believing in the theory have compared pictures of him with Chechen republic head Ramzan Kadyrov in June, where he appeared bloated with different shaped ears.

His mottled skin painted a stark contrast to previous pictures of the dictator, where he has previously posed on top of a horse or topless in a lake in a bizarre display of masculinity.

Of the body double rumours, Mr Geolotti said: "Does he probably have a body double? Yes, we have seen cases where he has gone and mingled with the crowds and in those circumstances, I'm sure it's not Putin.

"If you take the word of General SVR, it's the body double replacing him in every event which I simply don't believe."

Questioned about his use of body doubles, Kremlin spokesperson Peskov laughed: "I can tell you there are no doubles when it comes to work and so on.

“These [kinds of stories] belong to the category of fake news, discussed with enviable tenacity by a number of media outlets. This brings nothing but a smile [in the Kremlin].”

In a 2020 interview, Putin denied longstanding rumours that he uses body doubles, although he said he had been offered the chance to use one in the past for security reasons.

“It seems on one hand closer to science fiction than to have replicas,” Mr Nixey said. “But I think people are naive if they think it doesn’t happen. Those two things are contrary to each other but these things are doable and if they are doable, I’m sure they would do it in such an authoritarian state as Russia.”