

Sergei Skripal Affair: What if Russia is Responsible?

The Narrative: Russia has carried out yet another brutal attack, this time with a deadly nerve agent, on someone living in Britain. Use of the nerve agent posed a threat to innocent British subjects, affecting 21 people and seriously affecting a police officer. This is not the first time such an attack has been carried out in the UK. The murder of Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006 using a radioactive substance, polonium, has been proven to be the work of the Russian state; and a further 14 deaths are believed to be attributable to the Kremlin. Furthermore, Russia has poisoned its enemies abroad on other occasions, most notably the then candidate for the Presidency of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, in 2004. Russian political activist Vladimir Kara-Murza has been poisoned twice; and the journalist Anna Politkovskaya was also poisoned and later shot dead. **Since Putin has been running Russia, the Kremlin has a history of poisoning its opponents in a gruesome way.**

The British Response has been far too weak. It took ten years before an enquiry was allowed to proceed over Litvinenko's death, which then accused Putin of being involved; but no punitive measures were taken. **It is essential that the British Government makes a much stronger response this time.**

Russian Reaction: It is essential to realise that when dealing with Putin and his circle, you are not dealing with politicians, but with hardened men who believe that they have a mission to make Russia stand out on the world stage; for whom human life is a disposable commodity; who are unaffected by emotions such as compassion; who have become fantastically wealthy in Russia and will do *anything* to preserve that wealth. Litvinenko accused Putin of blowing up and killing hundreds of his own Russian citizens merely to give himself a public excuse to send the Russian Army back into Chechnya and in brutal fashion subdue that republic. Under these men, Russia attacked Georgia in 2008 and went even further in 2014 by illegally seizing Crimea from Ukraine and then sending troops into Eastern Ukraine and starting a war which continues to this day and has cost over 10,000 lives. One thing which links all of these events, including the murder of Litvinenko, is that these men constantly and without shame *lie* about their actions. **It is essential to understand their ability to lie and to have no remorse for their murderous actions, be it an individual, such as Litvinenko and possibly Skripal, or be it hundreds of their own people or thousands of innocent victims in Ukraine or Syria.**

Another feature of this mindset is that these men never forgive those who wrong them and *will* seek revenge. But they are calculating and patient. They will seek a suitable moment to take their revenge. They will allow the victim to be lulled into a false sense of security; and by striking when they do they will both catch the victim off guard *and* give a warning to others. Litvinenko was killed five years after his book was published accusing Putin of blowing up Russian citizens. Skripal may have been pardoned and expelled in a spy swap in 2010, but this *did not* mean that the Putin regime would leave him alone. Litvinenko's death not only removed a man who had wronged Putin, it sent out a warning to others, notably

Boris Berezovsky. Berezovsky died in suspicious circumstances in 2013. **Have no doubts that for Putin and his circle, “revenge is a dish best eaten cold”.**

So what should Britain’s response be this time? Putin and those in his regime behave like a bully. If you show weakness, they will exploit it. If you stand up to them, they will back down. Britain’s weak response over the Litvinenko murder has undoubtedly encouraged Russia to think that it can get away with other murders in the UK. Britain must try to gather support from NATO, European and Commonwealth allies – accepting that this may not be forthcoming or as enthusiastic as Britain might wish. But even if there were no active support from allies, **Britain is obliged to act to deter further Russian aggression.** These actions must be in ways which will hurt the Russian elite, as they are the ones who are either in Putin’s circle or dependent on him for their status and wealth.

Possible, realistic, first actions:

- **Actively publicise the above facts about the Russian leadership**, through regular media, social media; and with the assistance of specialists such as those at The Institute for Statecraft
- **Boycott this summer’s football World Cup**, and try to persuade other nations to do likewise. This might be a gamble, but the US boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980 (following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) *really hurt* Moscow. This was their big show on the world stage and the Americans spoilt it. The UK allowed athletes to compete, but not under the Union Flag
- **Withdraw the British Ambassador from Moscow and order the Russian Ambassador to leave the UK**
- **Refuse or revoke visas to leading Russians who are in or dependent on Putin’s circle – *and their families*.** This would really cause disquiet at the top, especially if their children who are at school here were forced to leave
- **Ban private jets carrying Russians from landing in the UK or British dependent territories**
- **Start discussions with the banks on stopping Russian access to SWIFT codes**
- **Start a campaign to prevent construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline**
- **Ban RT TV and Sputnik from operating in the UK.** They are not media outlets; their constitutions make it clear they are merely the mouthpieces of the Kremlin
- **Engage with British Muslims to publicise what has been happening with their Muslim brethren in Crimea since the Russian invasion**
- **Enlist cross-party help from MPs who understand the threat Russia poses to help publicise that threat**
- **Start a programme for schools to teach critical thinking and recognising false narratives.** Ask experts in combatting disinformation and outside education to help draw up the programme