

# The poisoning of Skripal and the campaign against Russia

28 March 2018

Washington's expulsion of 60 Russian diplomatic personnel Monday, and the coordinated actions of Britain, France, Germany, and over 20 other countries, each ordering the departure of a relative handful of Russian diplomats, is a provocative escalation of the unrelenting campaign of NATO powers against Russia.

The stated pretext for this action is the murky affair involving the poisoning of the former Russian spy and British double agent Sergei Skripal and his adult daughter on a park bench in the southern British city of Salisbury on March 4.

The government of Tory Prime Minister Theresa May has repeatedly stated over the past two weeks that it is "highly likely" that Moscow was behind the attack, which has left Skripal and his daughter hospitalized in critical condition. Britain's Foreign Minister Boris Johnson has gone further, adding that it is "overwhelmingly likely" that Vladimir Putin personally ordered the attack, going so far as to compare the Russian president to Adolf Hitler.

There are just two things missing to support these allegations: 1) any verifiable evidence, and 2) any plausible motive for the Russian government to carry out such a crime.

Several governments that joined Washington and London in expelling diplomats—in most cases ordering between one and four Russians to leave the country, with what Moscow has reported as quiet apologies—candidly admit that they have been shown no evidence whatsoever.

For its part, the British government has given less time for its supposed investigation of the poisonings to uncover the actual perpetrator than would be customary for an average street crime.

Unsupported by any evidence, the allegations made by Britain and the United States have been obviously concocted to provide political legitimacy for the anti-Russia campaign. There is no discernible motive for the Putin government to attempt the murder of Skripal—a man whom the Russian authorities had previously jailed and then released—on the very eve of Putin's reelection to his final term in office.

If one asks the basic question of any police investigator—who had the motive to carry out this crime?—the obvious answer would be US and British imperialism, which have used the incident to provide the pretext for the implementation of a policy that had been decided upon in advance.

The most plausible explanation of the poisoning in Salisbury is that the unfortunate Mr. Skripal, a washed-up double agent, and his daughter are merely expendable pawns in a conspiracy devised by the US and British intelligence agencies to further very definite geostrategic objectives.

But is it really possible that the American CIA and British MI6 would go so far as to murder two unsuspecting people in order to intensify the propaganda war against the Kremlin regime in the interests of its geopolitical objective?

Those who are staging this provocation belong to the same gang of imperialist criminals that invented "weapons of mass destruction" to justify the invasion of Iraq. The CIA has been engaged since the Obama administration in continuous assassinations around the globe, using drone missiles as their weapon of choice. This is only the latest installment in the unending crimes that earned the agency the epithet of Murder, Inc. And the Trump administration has just nominated a known black-site torturer to head the CIA.

Organizing the attempted murder of Skripal and his daughter and then pinning the crime on Moscow serves definite political ends.

For the past decade, since the failed US-backed war by Georgia to retake the breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, Washington has steadily escalated its aggression and propaganda against Russia, which US imperialism sees as an intolerable obstacle to its drive for global hegemony.

Tensions have only risen since the US-supported and fascist-led coup in Ukraine in 2014, which prompted Russia's annexation of Crimea, the predominantly Russian territory that serves as the base of its Black Sea fleet.

Finally, Russian—and Iranian—support for the government of President Bashar al-Assad has stymied the seven-year-old CIA-backed war for regime in Syria, leading to military tensions that have erupted with US forces killing Russian military contractors, and the Russian military warning Washington that it will retaliate if its forces in Syria are threatened.

The orchestrated outcry over the Skripal poisoning is part of an endless series of provocations, ranging from the Olympic doping "scandal" to the endless propaganda about Russian "meddling" in the US election, all designed to prepare the

population for war.

There are deep divisions over this policy, both within the US government and between Washington and its ostensible European allies. The Skripal poisoning serves as a weapon for those within the state apparatus in both Washington and London pushing for a more aggressive policy against Russia. It also provides a means of pressuring the other European powers, particularly Germany, which is increasingly pursuing its own great power interests and has established trade ties with Russia that cut across Washington's strategic objectives as well as the profit interests of US capitalism.

The clearest indication that the Skripal poisoning is part of a deliberate state campaign came Tuesday with the publication of virtually identical editorials in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the two principal conduits for the views and propaganda of the US ruling establishment and its intelligence agencies.

Accusing Russia of “disrupting Western governments and elections, subjugating neighbors such as Ukraine, and murdering its opponents in Western cities using banned chemical agents,” the *Post* insists that “Mr. Putin must be deterred. Expelling a few dozen of his spies is a step, but it's not likely to suffice.”

The *Times* welcomes the expulsion of the Russian diplomatic personnel, but similarly declares that “Mr. Trump will have to go even further to push back effectively against Mr. Putin's mischief, which runs the gamut from interference in the elections in America and other Western democracies to propelling the wars in Ukraine and Syria.”

The *Times* editorial is accompanied by a sinister piece on its news pages titled, “It's No Cold War, but Relations With Russia Turn Volatile.” The article is written by Andrew Higgins, the *Times* Moscow correspondent, who is part of the school of “investigative journalism” made infamous by Judith Miller, who wrote many of the paper's pieces promoting the lies about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction.”

Higgins was the principal author of a front-page *Times* piece published in April 2014 purporting to present definitive photographic evidence that the anti-Kiev revolt that swept eastern Ukraine in the wake of the CIA-backed coup was all the work of Russian spies and Special Forces troops. It was subsequently proven that “photographic evidence,” supplied to the *Times* by the US State Department, was entirely fabricated.

Educated at Cambridge University, Higgins pursued a subsequent study of Russian and Arabic at Middlebury College in Vermont, which is well known for its training of US intelligence operatives. Prior to working for the *Times*, he was the China correspondent for the *Washington Post*, expelled from the country after he was discovered with secret government documents in his luggage. In its attempt to reverse the expulsion, the *Post* recruited Henry Kissinger to lobby Beijing on his behalf.

The thesis of Higgins' piece on the Skripal affair is that

today's tensions between Washington and Moscow resemble not so much those that prevailed during the Cold War, but rather recalled “a period of paralyzing mistrust that followed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.”

While acknowledging that Putin's government, which represents Russia's ruling capitalist oligarchs, is not promoting global revolution, Higgins writes that it “revels in wrong-footing foreign governments by flouting established norms.”

The reality is that Russia, by virtue of its size and geographical position at the center of the Eurasian landmass, as well as its possession of the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal, stands as an impediment to US imperialism's hegemonic aims. Its failure to abide by “established norms,” i.e., US global dominance, cannot be tolerated.

Writing that the Western powers did not know how to deal with “Moscow's disruptive actions in the 1920s,” Higgins adds that “In the case of Britain, the leading power of the day and the first Western country to recognize the Soviet Union, the process had echoes of the present.”

He writes that, while Britain recognized “the new Bolshevik government in 1924,” it subsequently expelled Soviet diplomats after “police uncovered what they said was a Soviet espionage ring bent on spreading mayhem.”

Left out of Higgins' highly selective version of history is the infamous “Zinoviev Letter,” a document forged by Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, better known as MI6, and then provided to the military, the Conservative Party and the right-wing press.

Palmed off as a letter from Grigory Zinoviev, then president of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, the forgery was released four days before the election to the *Daily Mail*, which printed a banner headline: “Civil War Plot by Socialists' Masters: Moscow Orders To Our Reds; Great Plot Disclosed.”

The fake document contributed to the Labour Party, which had come into power for the first time in 1924 and had recognized the Soviet Union, losing by a landslide to the Tories.

The Zinoviev letter—one of the greatest British political scandals of the 20th century—was used to swing an election. The fabrication surrounding the Skripal poisoning, which Higgins, the *Times* and their “sources” in the CIA are promoting, is being used to prepare a world war.

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