

Britain piles on lies to shore up Skripal poisoning accusations against Russia

Robert Stevens
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The British government is doubling down on its campaign of dissembling and lies in response to the unravelling of its efforts to blame Russia for the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal.

With Yulia getting “stronger by the day” and her father also recovering well, a United Nations Security Council meeting Thursday saw Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia tear apart the claims by Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson that the Skripals were victims of a novichok nerve agent produced in Russia.

He noted how on Tuesday Gary Aitkenhead, chief executive of the UK Porton Down chemical and military research laboratory, admitted that it had not in fact identified the origins of the nerve agent used against the Skripals. His admission proved the government and Johnson in particular, to be serial liars.

Nebenzia recalled that prior to the UN meeting called by Britain on March 14, May issued a letter containing “heinous and totally unsubstantiated accusations against Russia of using chemical weapons on the UK soil.”

“UK representatives promised at that meeting to regularly brief the Council on the course of the investigation,” he said. “However, no briefings came from their side.”

Britain had ridden roughshod over basic standards of international law, refusing all requests for information or to answer more than 40 questions asked of them by Russia. Nebenzia added that Sergei and Yulia Skripal were Russian citizens, yet Russia had been denied consular access even though they “may have become victims of a possible terrorist attack carried out on British soil.”

In response Britain ratcheted up the anti-Russian rhetoric still further, with Karen Pierce, the UK’s

Permanent Representative, stating after Nebenzia spoke, “We gave 24 hours,” for Russian to respond to the UK’s allegations of culpability, “because this is a weapon of mass destruction.” In another part of the speech, Pierce again stated that a weapon of mass destruction had been used in an “attempt to kill civilians on British soil.”

Pierce’s comments assumed the level of farce, given that the “weapon of mass destruction” referred to—one supposedly ten times more powerful than any other nerve agent—has killed no one. Instead, all its alleged victims—including Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who was the first to attend the scene and the only other person affected—have now substantially recovered. Yulia Skripal even told her cousin Viktoria by telephone that she will be discharged shortly!

As for their long-term health, Rupert Murdoch’s *Sunday Times* reported that the UK is considering offering the Skripals new identities and a new life in the United States according to “unnamed” officials of MI6.

On Saturday, Russia demanded a meeting between its Ambassador to Britain, Alexander Yakovenko, and Johnson “to discuss the whole range of bilateral issues, as well as the investigation of the Salisbury incident.” The Foreign Office said it would respond in “in due course,” but that the meeting request was a “diversionary tactic” by Russia.

Faced with such a devastating exposure of the May government’s concoctions within the space of a month, the British media went into damage limitation mode, pleading with the government to stop digging a deeper hole for itself.

The day after the UN Security Council meeting, the *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Financial Times* produced co-ordinated editorials warning, in the *FT*’s words,

“Getting drawn into a misinformation war is an unhelpful distraction.”

Instead, it demanded, “While the UK continues to investigate the circumstances of the Skripal attack, it should be drawing up the next set of penalties against Russia.”

The *Guardian* editorialised, “Russia is engaging in an aggressive disinformation war over the Skripal poisoning. It would be disastrous to respond in kind.”

The *Telegraph*, the Tory government’s house organ, urged the government to now “give details of Skripal case” and warned that the UK’s policy of assigning blame without providing a shred of evidence had backfired badly. “[T]here is a real risk that the Russians will win the information war if the British side continues to be so secretive.” It added, “What is important now is not to lose the initiative or to allow the Russians to sow doubts in the minds not just of Britain’s allies but of the public.”

The UK media also decided that it was now necessary to row back on its previous claims of how deadly novichok supposedly is.

On Friday, stories began to circulate in the corporate media and the state-run BBC to account for the Skripals’ miraculous recovery. *Sky News*, for example, claimed in the vaguest terms that it was “likely” that “one of several general antidotes” had been given to the Skripals and “they appear to have helped.”

On Sunday, the *Daily Mail* went one step further into the realm of the absurd. It cited the comments of Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a former army commander in the UK’s Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Regiment, who claimed, “This botched double murder attempt was defeated by the brilliance of British scientists and the doctors in Salisbury who, under immense pressure, came up with a bespoke set of treatments to thwart a boutique chemical weapon specifically designed for assassinations.”

It cited an “anonymous source” backing up Bretton-Gordon’s claims of the “boutique” character of the novichok employed:

“The Kremlin wanted to get its agents out of Britain before the Novichok could be identified. So they reduced its toxicity and used it in a gel form rather than as a gas—had the Skripals inhaled the nerve agent they would have died very quickly. The Russians still banked on Sergei and Yulia dying as a result of their

exposure, even though they had effectively watered it down.”

On Sunday, Johnson himself entered the fray, authoring an op-ed in the *Sunday Times*, complaining of how Russia was making a “cynical attempt to bury awkward facts beneath an avalanche of lies and disinformation.”

Assured of the servile backing of Britain’s media, he attributed all the government’s woes and the fact that the Kremlin was being lent a “false credibility to its propaganda onslaught” to the cause that Labour Party leader “Jeremy Corbyn has joined this effort... Truly he is the Kremlin’s useful idiot.”

The *Observer*, the *Guardian*’s Sunday sister paper, was more realistic in its appraisal. Editorialising on “a dangerous new world of competing global visions,” it warned that “regardless of the justice of Britain’s grievance,” Russia was “succeeding in persuading much ‘unofficial’ global public opinion that its denials are credible.”

As is always the case, the *Observer* proposed as an answer measures to counter “the Kremlin’s ruthless use of social media and disinformation and propaganda tools” in the name of combating “fake news.”

In words that were more honest than they were clearly meant to be, it suggested, “What we face now is a struggle over opposing models of political and social control, rather than geo-strategic dominance or competing ideologies, involving not only Russia but all the countries of the modern world... Put bluntly, it is about truth and lies.”



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