



NATO Foundation
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Fake news lead to fake espionage?

The Skripal case created objectively a further rift between the West and Russia. According to the British government and supported by mainstream narrative, the fact that the Novichok nerve agent gas was used and therefore a chemical weapon on the territory of a NATO country, is a serious matter, a hostile action and condemnable like an act of war. Indeed also the Russian government considers the fact is as very serious, falling under the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons not only on territories of NATO countries, but in general in any country and by any country.

Obviously the contention bone is around who perpetrated the attack.

Mainstream media made the evident connection between the chemical agent of Russian origin, the victim as Russian GRU defector (and the “Aquarium” had a reputation for ruthless punishments) and Moscow as masterminding the attack. Moscow instead insists that the same spy had been pardoned and he was allowed to leave the country, meaning that he did not constitute a threat to national security, also because if the GRU wanted to snuff him, it could have done it quietly in country many years ago.

The natural counter-accusation hinges on a false flag killing and the counter-campaign is such that UK government sources had to explicitly refute different conspiracy theories (apparently 30 different versions of Skripal’s case are in circulation). The problem is that now a German media enquiry (Die Zeit and Süddeutsche Zeitung) has shown that Novichok samples and their production processes fell into the hands of Western intelligence service during the disintegration of the USSR; small quantities of this class of agents were reproduced in at least five NATO countries.

“Cui prodest/bono?” is another typical talk show question: apparently of unbeatable common sense, but in real life very difficult to apply without knowledge of crucial details and solid analytics. Remember the fake campaign on Saddam’s WMD? That question was regularly trotted out against the horrible dictator.

The practical consequence of this disgraceful affair, where luckily both victims (the former spy and his innocent daughter) survived, is that a number of cross-expulsions of diplomats or personnel under diplomatic cover happened. Frankly much ado for little consequence on more serious political and economic matters, despite the essential principles mentioned at the beginning of this article.

In the end there are three very important issues raised by this ugly affair. First, if the media environment is allowed to be polluted systematically by fake or “alternative truth” accounts, how does this impact on the open sources’ environment used also by intelligence?

Secondly, if lying and covering up becomes a national sport, why should intelligence retain its integrity? The tale applies not only to “Russkies” (if the czar would know!), but even more disquietingly to democracies. Was and is not truth a hallmark of democratic systems?

Third point, it is politically very clear that the US President wants to have a business-like approach to Russia, possibly a rather close one, because China is for him a much more serious problem. Nothing new under the sun, just a reversal of roles of Nixon’s ping-pong diplomacy with China.

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