

PUTIN SEES AND HEARS IT ALL: HOW RUSSIA'S INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES MENACE THE UK

BY DR ANDREW FOXALL



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“Dr. Foxall’s report forcefully reminds us that Russian Intelligence activity in the West is still large scale and intrusive, and that we need to devote significant resources and expertise ourselves to monitoring and blunting this threat to our national security. As during the Cold War an effective counterintelligence capability remains an essential part of our own intelligence and security community.”

Sir Richard Dearlove KCMG OBE

Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) (1999-2004)

“Anyone who is relaxed or complacent about Russian intelligence activity in the United Kingdom should read this Report. Not only have we experienced the murder of Litvinenko and the attempted murder of the Skripals on British soil, Britain and the West as a whole face an unrelenting assault from Putin’s bloated intelligence and security agencies. They may have been unable to conceal their incompetence, but they are large, well-funded and have sinister intent.”

The Rt Hon Sir Malcolm Rifkind KCMG QC

Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (2010-2015)

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1995-1997)

Secretary of State for Defence (1992-1995)

“For too long, too many people have been blind to the scale of the Kremlin’s insidious campaign of espionage on our streets. This report outlines in dramatic detail some of the most brazen and banal accounts from an unto-now hidden world. We would do well to heed its warnings.”

Ian Austin MP

Member, Foreign Affairs Select Committee (2017-present)

Member, Home Affairs Select Committee (2013-2015)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department for Communities and Local Government) (2009-2010)

About the Author

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Andrew is the author of *Ethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Russia* (Routledge, 2014) and has written for publications including *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *TIME*, and *Foreign Policy*. He holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford.

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Executive Summary

- Russia's intelligence and security agencies – including, the FSB (Federal Security Service), the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff), and the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service) – are used to support the Kremlin's wider geopolitical objectives. Well-funded and increasingly active, they are engaged in campaigns of domestic repression and foreign adventurism. All three are active in the UK.
- Individuals with links to two of Russia's three intelligence agencies – the FSB and GRU – have murdered individuals on UK soil over the last 12 years. Two serving GRU officers carried out the attempted assassinations of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March 2018, with the military-grade nerve agent Novichok. Months later, in July, Dawn Sturgess died as a result of being exposed to the same substance. A former KGB (Committee for State Security, the Soviet-era institution to which the FSB is the main successor) operative, meanwhile, was responsible for the killing of Alexander Litvinenko in November 2006, with the radioactive isotope Polonium-210.
- As well as assassinations, Russia's agencies are engaged in all manner of activities associated with active measures – the subversive, political warfare originally employed by the KGB during the Cold War. This includes espionage. According to well-placed intelligence sources, Russia has as many as 200 case officers in the UK, handling upwards of 500 agents. In addition, the agencies can call upon informants; these are found within the Russian expatriate community, which is estimated to number up to 150,000 people in London alone, as well as within British society as a whole.
- The primary task for Russia's spies is to gather intelligence on individuals who currently occupy, or previously occupied, positions of influence and power, particularly those who are consequential to Russian affairs. For the purposes of this paper, I held on-and-off-the-record conversations with 16 such people, from Russian dissidents and Western businesspeople to Russia-watchers and current and former Whitehall officials. All described a growing belief that Russia's intelligence agencies are active, and, according to several, that they (together with their families and close associates) are being monitored. In a small number of cases, individuals have received overt threats – including to their lives.
- There are a number of actions the UK government could take to counter Russia's activities, including: adopting a zero-tolerance approach to Russian intelligence and security operations on its territory; becoming more open about Russian intelligence and security operations on its territory; and, downgrading intelligence materials for public consumption as and when the occasion demands it. The UK, together with its Western allies, must demonstrate to Russia that its activities have a major cost. This may or may not lead the Kremlin to take a more cautious approach, but it would strike a serious blow to Moscow's intelligence operations and foreign policy objectives.

“Long after you’ve left Russia, you realise that Russia hasn’t left you.”

– Russian opposition figure, 2018.¹

Introduction

The poisoning of Sergei Skripal, a retired former GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff) officer, and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury in March focused the UK government’s attention on an issue it hoped to have left behind a dozen years earlier – that the Kremlin deems it acceptable to use Britain as a location for assassinating its opponents.² Skripal was sentenced in August 2006 to 13 years in jail in Russia for spying for Britain, and he came to UK as a result of a spy swap in July 2010. Days after the poisoning of the Skripals, Nikolai Glushkov, a Russian businessman and critic of President Vladimir Putin, was murdered in London. A police investigation led by counter-terrorism officers is ongoing. A year earlier, in March 2017, Glushkov had been named top of a list of “fugitives from justice” published by the Russian Embassy in the UK.³

In response to the poisoning of the Skripals, with the military-grade nerve agent Novichok, Prime Minister Theresa May declared that she would take action to “dismantle the Russian espionage network in the UK” by, most immediately, expelling 23 “undeclared intelligence officers”.⁴ Four months later, in late June, Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess happened across a discarded vial of Novichok – both were hospitalised, with Sturgess dying on 8 July. In September, May announced that the Skripals had been poisoned by two active GRU officers, Ruslan Borishov and Alexander Petrov. The poisoning, she said, had “almost certainly” been approved by “a senior level of the Russian state”.⁵ The investigative journalism platform Bellingcat subsequently unmasked the two GRU officers as Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga and Dr Alexander Mishkin respectively, and revealed that both had received Russia’s highest honour – the ‘Hero of the Russian Federation’ award – from Putin in 2014.⁶

Sergei Skripal was the second former Russian officer to be poisoned on British soil, after the killing of Alexander Litvinenko, a former FSB (Federal Security Service) and, before it, KGB (Committee for State Security) officer, in November 2006.⁷ One of the two chief suspects in the case, Andrei Lugovoi, was a former KGB agent and Federal Protection Service (FSO) officer.⁸ He, together with Dmitri Kovtun, poisoned Litvinenko in a Mayfair hotel with the radioactive isotope Polonium-210, and left a trail of contamination across London and Europe as he returned

¹ Conversation with Russian opposition figure, July 2018.

² In 2010 the official name of the agency changed from ‘Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’ (GRU) to ‘Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’ (‘GU’). Nevertheless, ‘GRU’ continues to be commonly used and hence it is the term I use in this paper.

³ ‘Why Are Fugitives From Justice Welcome in the UK?’, *The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 16 March 2017, available at: <https://rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6008>, last visited: 24 October 2018.

⁴ ‘PM Commons Statement on Salisbury incident response: 14 March 2018’, *HM Government*, 14 March 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-commons-statement-on-salisbury-incident-response-14-march-2018>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁵ ‘PM statement on the Salisbury investigation: 5 September 2018’, *HM Government*, 5 September 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-the-salisbury-investigation-5-september-2018>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁶ ‘Skripal Suspect Boshirov Identified as GRU Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga’, *Bellingcat*, 26 September 2018, available at: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/26/skripal-suspect-boshirov-identified-gru-colonel-anatoliy-chepiga/>, last visited: 19 October 2018; and ‘Second Skripal Poisoning Suspect Identified as Dr. Alexander Mishkin’, *Bellingcat*, 8 October 2018, available at: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/10/08/second-skripal-poisoning-suspect-identified-as-dr-alexander-mishkin/>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁷ According to BuzzFeed, 14 people are suspected of having been killed in Britain by Russian spies since 2003. See, ‘From Russia With Blood’, *BuzzFeed*, 15 June 2017, available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/heidiblake/from-russia-with-blood-14-suspected-hits-on-british-soil?utm_term=.kdg4wlog#.kuDg2NLYK, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁸ The Federal Protective Service (FSO) is an agency concerned with the protection of high-ranking state officials. Its origins lie in the KGB’s Ninth Chief Directorate.

to Moscow. A public inquiry, which concluded in 2015 and whose findings were published in 2016, found that the FSB operation to kill Litvinenko was “probably approved” by Putin and Nikolai Patrushev, then head of the FSB and now chair of Russia’s Security Council.⁹

In spite of Litvinenko’s murder, the UK’s national security apparatus was slow to reflect the threat posed by Russia – or ‘hostile state activity’, to use the Government’s language. In 2010 – just four years after Litvinenko’s murder – the word “Russia” did not even appear in the National Security Council’s (NSC) annual strategic defence and security review.¹⁰ Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014, Russia was mentioned in the NSC’s annual review of 2015 – but it was not a top priority.¹¹ It was only in 2016 that Russia was reclassified as a “tier one” threat to national security, alongside Islamic terrorism, just as it had been during the Cold War.¹²

Unlike for the countries of eastern and central Europe, the threat Russia poses to the UK is not primarily military – aside from Russia’s frequent probing of the UK’s air- and sea-space,¹³ and the UK’s deployment of troops to the Baltic States and Poland as part of NATO measures to counter Russian aggression in the region. Instead, the threat comes from Russia’s full spectrum approach to foreign policy in which, according to Russia’s 2015 Military Doctrine, “military force and political, economic, informational or other non-military measures” are integrated to achieve political goals.¹⁴ Such an approach has received considerable attention since 2013 given the notoriety of the so-called ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’, but it has been visible since the 1990s.

This paper deals with the UK-based activities of Russia’s three main intelligence agencies: the FSB, which is the primary successor to the Soviet-era KGB and is subordinate to the President; the GRU, which is subordinate to Russia’s military command (i.e., the Minister of Defence and Chief of the General Staff); and, the SVR, or Foreign Intelligence Service, which is also a successor to the KGB and is subordinate to the President. These agencies, in the words of Mark Galeotti, the pre-eminent expert on Russia’s intelligence services, “are active, aggressive, and well funded. They are granted considerable latitude in their methods, unconstrained by the concerns of diplomats or the scrutiny of legislators”.¹⁵ Because these agencies are central to Russia’s efforts to undermine the post-World War Two international system, and because these efforts are unlikely to change anytime soon, it is important to explore their activities in detail – or, at least, in as much detail as is possible.

Much of the current discussion in London and other Western capitals is focused on what the West can do to counter Russia’s aggressive activities overseas. By way of attempting to further this discussion, this paper suggests a number of policy recommendations for the UK

⁹ ‘The Litvinenko Inquiry: Report into the death of Alexander Litvinenko’, *HM Government* (2016), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/493860/The-Litvinenko-Inquiry-H-C-695-web.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018, p. 244.

¹⁰ ‘A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy’, *HM Government* (2010), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018.

¹¹ ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom’, *HM Government* (2015), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018.

¹² ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: First Annual Report 2016’, *HM Government* (2016), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575378/national_security_strategy_strategic_defence_security_review_annual_report_2016.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018.

¹³ See, for example, Foxall, A., *Close Encounters: Russian Military Activities in the Vicinity of UK Air and Sea Space, 2005-2016*, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2017), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Close-Encounters-002.pdf>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

¹⁴ Russian Federation, *Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], approved by the president of the Russian Federation on 25 December 2014, Moscow.

¹⁵ Galeotti, M., ‘Putin’s Hydra: Inside Russia’s Intelligence Services’, *European Council on Foreign Relations* (2016), available at: https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_169_-_PUTINS_HYDRA_INSIDE_THE_RUSSIAN_INTELLIGENCE_SERVICES_1513.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018, pp. 1-2.

government, including: adopting a zero-tolerance approach to Russian intelligence and security operations on its territory; becoming more open about Russian intelligence and security operations on its territory; and, downgrading intelligence materials for public consumption as and when the occasion demands it. The UK, together with its Western allies, must demonstrate to Russia that its activities have a major cost. This may or may not lead the Kremlin to take a more cautious approach, but either way it would deal a serious blow to Moscow's intelligence operations and foreign policy objectives.

By definition, this paper addresses issues involving sensitive matters, some of which touch on topics of national security. Beyond open source materials and on-the-record interviews (which are footnoted), many of the assertions and examples used in this paper have been drawn partially or wholly from off-the-record interviews and conversations with individuals who were either not authorised to talk publicly or who were concerned about their safety (or that of their family). In these instances, individuals or events have been anonymised. Of course, it is always hard to accept such information at face value, but wherever possible it was corroborated by other sources. In total, 16 people were interviewed for this paper, ranging from Russian dissidents and Western businesspeople and human-rights activists, to Russia-watchers and current and former Whitehall officials.

2. Russia's Bloated Security State

As the journalist Ben Judah notes, it is easy to dismiss the scale of Russia's intelligence and security activities in the West "as paranoid reactionary Cold War talk. But Vladimir Putin is a paranoid reactionary from the Cold War".¹⁶ Putin is a former intelligence officer – albeit, one who only reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel¹⁷ – and during his 18 years in power he has expanded Russia's domestic and foreign intelligence and security networks to a monstrous size. The winners of this expansion have been the *siloviki* (men of force) – individuals from the country's intelligence, military, and security services.

Over the last decade, the two sectors of Russia's economy that primarily concern security issues – defence, and law and order – have received between a fifth and a third of Russia's federal budget year on year (see Table 1, below). Between 2008 and 2016, spending on these two sectors more than tripled, growing from 22.7% of the federal budget's total outlay in 2009 to almost 35% in 2016. This mirrored the growing emphasis Putin placed on the country's security at this time. During this period, the Russian president spoke increasingly frequently about the need to secure Russia's borders in the face of Western 'aggression', how essential it was for Russia to wage a pro-active foreign policy in order to secure its interests abroad and, latterly, about the threat posed by a 'fifth column' to Russia's domestic stability.

All of this costs money – but there is now less in Russia's coffers to go around than before. In 2008, Russia was rocked by the global financial crisis – GDP fell by 7.8% in 2009 alone. While the economy was quick to recover, registering 4.5% growth in 2010, it has stagnated since, with growth falling to year-on-year to 2014, when it was just 0.7%. The same year, Russia was hit by the double whammy of falling oil prices and Western sanctions. GDP fell by 3.7% in 2015 and 0.2% the following year. Over this period, the Kremlin raided Russia's two piggy banks, the National Welfare Fund and Reserve Fund, in order to balance the books. That money has now begun to run out.¹⁸ Because of this, spending on defence, and law and order fell by almost a fifth in 2017, following its peak in 2016.

Nevertheless, in 2017 spending on defence, and law and order still accounted for almost a third of the total federal budget – the former for 17% of spending, and the latter for a further 12%. Furthermore, some funds that were devoted to other sectors, such as education and economic development, were instead used for defence-related programmes, including the revived Soviet-era "Ready for Labour and Defense" (GTO) fitness programme. In all likelihood, therefore, well over a third of the 2017 federal budget was spent on security. Much of this money will have been spent on buying new equipment and maintaining old equipment, research and development, and conducting military exercises. But some will also have been spent on people.

Official figures for the number of individuals employed in the FSB, the GRU, and the SVR are hard to come by. Nevertheless, Victor Madeira, an expert on Soviet and Russian intelligence at the Institute for Statecraft, estimates that there are between 280,000 to 480,000 people in the GRU¹⁹; 387,000 people in the FSB; and, 13,000 people in the SVR.²⁰ In total, therefore, he

¹⁶ Judah, B., 'London beware. Putin sees it all', *The Times*, 8 March 2015, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/london-beware-putin-sees-it-all-mtdpprmqd58>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

¹⁷ In an interview with journalists in 2000, Putin grudgingly admitted that the fact the KGB placed him in East Germany rather than the West was an indication of how lowly they rated him. Vladimir Kryuchkov, who was a high-ranking KGB officer between 1974 and 1991 (including serving as its Chairman between 1988 and 1991), once tellingly said that he had never heard of Putin when he was in service. See, Isachenkov, V., 'Putin Recalls KGB Career with Pride', *Associated Press*, 10 March 2000.

¹⁸ The Reserve Fund ceased to exist as of 1 January 2018, when its remaining funds were transferred to the National Welfare Fund.

¹⁹ Pavel Felgenhauer, a Russian defence expert, estimates the size of the GRU to be in the same region. See, Blank, S. (2008) 'Threats to and from Russia: An Assessment', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 21 (3), 491-526, p. 510

²⁰ 'Supplementary written evidence submitted by Dr Victor Madeira', *House of Commons Defence Committee inquiry on 'Russia: implications for UK defence and security*, 12 April 2016, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/russia-implications-for-uk-defence-and-security/written/31103.html>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

Table 1 Russia's Federal Budget and its Spending on Defence, and Law and Order, 2008-2017²¹

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Budget Expenditure (RUB billion)	7,570.9	9,660.1	10,117.5	10,925.6	12,895.0	13,342.9	14,831.6	15,620.3	16,416.4	16,420.3
Defence (RUB billion) ²²	1,040.9	1,188.2	1,276.5	1,516.0	1,812.4	2,103.6	2,479.1	3,181.4	3,775.3	2,852.3
Law and Order (RUB billion) ²³	835.6	1,004.5	1,085.4	1,259.8	1,843.0	2,061.6	2,086.2	1,965.6	1,898.7	1,918.0
Total Defence and Law and Order (RUB billion)	1,876.4	2,192.7	2,361.8	2,775.8	3,655.4	4,165.2	4,565.2	5,147.0	5,674.0	4,770.3
Defence, and Law and Order as % of Total Budget Expenditure	24.8	22.7	23.3	25.4	28.4	31.2	30.8	32.9	34.6	29.1

²¹ 'Annual report on execution of the federal budget (starting from January 1, 2006)', *Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation*, 17 July 2018, available at: http://old.minfin.ru/en/statistics/fedbud/execute/?id_4=25609, last visited: 19 October 2018.

²² Includes the GRU.

²³ Includes the FSB and SVR.

estimates there are between 680,000 and 880,000 people in these three agencies alone. For means of comparison, the UK has just 16,868 people devoted to intelligence and security across all of its seven agencies (see Table 2).

Russia's three intelligence and security agencies have rather different remits. The primary remit of the FSB is domestic security, but it also undertakes certain foreign activities, including intimidation and assassination.²⁴ The SVR and the GRU are both primarily engaged in foreign intelligence gathering, yet approach the job rather differently. The SVR prefers long-term, deep-cover spy rings,²⁵ while the GRU is in the game of short-term, high-risk operations. Since Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, these three agencies have grown in prominence as they have been unleashed in campaigns of foreign adventurism (and, in the case of the FSB, domestic repression).

Table 2 A Table Showing British Security Agencies and their Staffing, 31 March 2016²⁶

British Security Agency	Staff Numbers (as of 31 March 2016)
GCHQ	5,806
MI5	4,053
SIS	2,594
Defence Intelligence	3,655
National Security Secretariat (NSS)	151
Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO)	58
Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism	551
TOTAL	16,868

Why is Russia's security state so bloated? Putin's understanding of the post-Cold War world is diametrically opposed to that of the West. Like most of Russia's military and political elite, he sees periods of 'peace' not as opportunities to prosper and relax, but instead as opportunities to prepare for the next (inevitable) conflict. For at least a decade, the Kremlin has believed that Russia is engaged in a zero-sum conflict with the West and that it faces a serious, even existential, threat. The Kremlin also believes that the West took advantage of Russia in the 1990s when it was weak, and it is willing to go to extremes to ensure that this does not happen again. This 'wartime mind-set' was evident before 2014, but has become especially prominent since.

In Putin's eyes, the US, as during the Cold War, is Russia's main strategic rival. Accordingly, many of Moscow's defence and security resources are directed at Washington, D.C. This includes its intelligence agencies. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the FBI's apprehension of Anna Chapman, a 'sleeper' agent deployed to London and then New York, and nine other Russian 'illegals', in June 2010.²⁷ It was these ten individuals whom the Kremlin exchanged, in July 2010, for Sergei Skripal and three other Russian nationals accused of espionage.

²⁴ These are powers that were given to the FSB by President Putin in 2006 after the passing of two laws. Taken together, the laws permit Russia to use its armed forces and special services beyond its own borders, and to carry out extrajudicial killings.

²⁵ Such activities are run by the SVR's mysterious "Directorate S".

²⁶ Figures are taken from 'Annual Report 2016 -2017', *Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament* (2017), available at: https://b1cba9b3-a-5e6631fd-s-sites.googlegroups.com/a/independent.gov.uk/isc/files/2016-2017_ISC_AR.pdf?attachauth=ANoY7coVDCEijL5AWrGJnhuchhghgfBK846a4MQ8FY4-PavNWk-MrzHaHQhUAhowus-lrBvjKVwkh4UJFqOyEKMutU6GE dADd0SX6vIm0wzIDw1w-vx7D00e5LLb-Sz4wsGvlz8pXlqDud22rkJdPSIC9ikmsepsJY-UF5uMWv7Ms6TDDxZbqP4XxTlo96 XjIRV-G3PxiUvRtG1KXfDXHdHNBxjvSJFDyITjm5QyIFg9a5UNe4mOS4%3D&attredirects=0, last visited: 19 October 2018.

²⁷ A number of Chapman's fellow spies attended US universities. See, Golden, D., 'Why Russian Spies Really Like American Universities', *ProPublica*, 23 July 2018, available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/why-russian-spies-really-like-american-universities>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

Other resources are directed at NATO and the European Union (EU), as well as collective security interests.²⁸ In 2009, Herman Simm, a former official in Estonia's defence ministry, was jailed for passing classified NATO documents to Russia. According to the author Edward Lucas, who interviewed Simm in prison, the information he passed included "the alliances innermost secrets, from the content of meetings to the details of its most important codes."²⁹ In December 2017, Bela Kovacs, a Hungarian MEP, was charged with spying on the EU for Russia.³⁰ He is alleged to have provided information to Russia on a range of EU issues, including energy negotiations, relations with Belarus, and the European banking sector.

²⁸ 'ANNUAL PUBLIC REPORT 2017', Constitutional Protection Bureau (SAB) of the Republic of Latvia, available at: www.sab.gov.lv/files/Public_report_2017.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018.

²⁹ Lucas, E. *Deception: Spies, Lies and How Russia Dupes the West* (London, 2013), p. 275.

³⁰ 'European Parliament Member From Hungary Charged With Spying For Russia', *RFE/RL*, 7 December 2017, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/european-parliament-member-hungary-kovacs-charged-spying-russia/28902077.html>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

3. Russia's Eyes and Ears in London

The UK is strategically important to Russia. It is one of only three NATO nuclear powers; it has one of the most well-resourced militaries in Europe; it is one of the two senior partners in the 'Five Eyes' intelligence alliance; and, it has significant diplomatic clout and extensive global influence, through its soft power. And London, its capital, is a key battleground for the Kremlin. It has become a frontline in Vladimir Putin's domestic campaign against dissidents and opposition figures, and his foreign campaign to change how Russia is viewed in the West.

It is understandable, therefore, that Russia maintains a large spying operation in the UK – just as it did during the Cold War. According to Oleg Gordievsky, the KGB colonel who was a double agent for MI6, there were 39 Soviet case officers (intelligence officers who 'manage' spies) in London in 1985 – 25 from the KGB and 14 from the GRU. A quarter of a century later, in 2010, he noted "there are exactly the same number there now".³¹ The same year, MI5 warned that "the threat from Russian espionage continues to be significant and is similar to the Cold War [...] the number of Russian intelligence officers in London is at the same level as in Soviet times".³²

In the years since, the number of case officers is believed to have increased. In 2013, Gordievsky suggested, hinting at sources inside British intelligence, that the number had risen to 51 – 37 from the FSB and SVR, and 14 from the GRU.³³ Current and former government and intelligence officials are confident that the number of case officers now comfortably surpasses Cold War levels. Well-placed sources estimate that there are now as many as 200 case officers in the UK, handling upwards of 500 agents³⁴. In addition, there are informants that the agents can call upon. These are found within the Russian expatriate community as well as within British society as a whole.³⁵

Russia maintains two main types of spies in the UK. The first are 'declared' and officially work in the Embassy. They occupy roles, often as an attaché or secretary, in which they liaise between their own country's intelligence and security services and those of the UK. The second type are 'undeclared'. Some will work in the Embassy, but will not be accredited as intelligence or security officers. Instead, they will frequently hold seemingly innocuous positions, such as in the cultural or trade section.

On top of this, there are other spies that Russia can draw upon. Some will be individuals using false identities to pose as British citizens (so-called 'illegal' agents). Others will be Russian nationals living openly in Britain under their real identities, but with few (if any) links to Russia's intelligence and security agencies (so-called 'non-official cover'). Yet more still will travel to the UK on short operational visits, either under their own names or with false identities, using standard immigration routes.

One of the most striking aspects of how Russia's intelligence agencies operate is the extent to which they readily integrate other institutions and individuals into their activities. Russia's spies, for example, will often work not only with the Embassy, but also through or in parallel with

³¹ Gordievsky, O., 'Russian spies: they can't take their eyes off us', *The Telegraph*, 7 December 2010, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/8185810/Russian-spies-they-cant-take-their-eyes-off-us.html>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

³² Norton-Taylor, R., 'Russian spies in UK 'at cold war levels', says MI5', *The Guardian*, 29 June 2010, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/29/russian-spies-cold-war-levels>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

³³ Harding, L. 'Gordievsky: Russia has as many spies in Britain now as the USSR ever did', *The Guardian*, 11 March 2013, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/11/russian-spies-britain-oleg-gordievsky>, last visited: 26 October 2018.

³⁴ Interviews with former British intelligence officer, June 2018 and current British intelligence officer, July 2018.

³⁵ In 2012, for example, a Royal Navy submariner was caught trying to sell classified information to Russia. See: Laville, S., 'Royal Navy submariner admits meeting 'Russian spies'', *The Guardian*, 13 November 2012, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/nov/13/submariner-collected-codes-russian-spies>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

other state apparatus. Russia's embassy in Kensington currently maintains a staff of 56 diplomats,³⁶ around half of whom, Government sources suggest, are believed to be engaged in intelligence work – both declared and undeclared.³⁷

Russia's Trade Delegation, based in leafy Highgate, is also thought to be home to a number of undeclared intelligence officers, as it was during the Cold War.³⁸ So too is *Rosstrudnichestvo* (the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), whose offices are off High Street Kensington. Intelligence sources suggested that the proportion of spies amongst the staff in the Delegation could be even higher than in the Embassy.³⁹

According to Whitehall sources, Russia's spies represent all three of Russia's main intelligence agencies: the FSB; the GRU; and, the SVR. Broadly speaking, the three agencies are engaged in different, but often overlapping, work. The FSB focuses on political affairs, particularly individuals and organisations who are politically active and who are engaged in anti-Putin activities. The SVR focuses on traditional 'spy craft' – gathering intelligence across the spectrum, from military and political secrets to commercial information. The GRU, meanwhile, has a narrower focus, historically, and is concerned more with military affairs.

In the words of a former member of Russia's intelligence and security agencies, "All three [agencies] seek to advance the Kremlin's agenda and are, to a greater or lesser extent, engaged in active measures".⁴⁰

³⁶ According to the London Diplomatic List (last updated 10/9/2018), see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/739261/London_Diplomatic_List_-_September_2018.pdf, last visited: 30 October 2018.

³⁷ Conversations in London, August and September 2018.

³⁸ The example of Oleg Lyalin is a case in point. Lyalin was officially the "knitwear representative" in the Soviet Trade Delegation, but in reality was a senior KGB intelligence officer. His defection to the UK in 1971 led directly to Operation Foot, in which the UK expelled 105 suspected Soviet spies. See, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-purge-of-putins-spooks-is-long-overdue-nvx05mqflfk>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

³⁹ Interviews with former British intelligence officer, September 2018 and with former British civil servant, August 2018.

⁴⁰ Conversation in London, September 2018

4. Whom Does Russia Target? And How?

An important task for Russia's spies is to gather intelligence on individuals who currently occupy, or previously occupied, positions of influence and power, and those who are in a position to obtain secrets or sensitive information. As such, they pay particular attention to prominent Russians, Westerners, and Russia-watchers who live in London.

Since 2000, Britain has granted political asylum to a range of individuals – from Akhmed Zakaev and Boris Berezovsky to Vladimir Ashurkov and Evgeny Chichvarkin – who have blended seamlessly into 'Londongrad'. Estimates suggest that the city is home to as many as 150, 000 Russian expats.⁴¹ London is also home to individuals – businessmen, government officials, politicians, and experts – who interest Vladimir Putin and who, accordingly, are monitored. It is a city, as one interviewee put it, where “a businessman from Russia, who is pro-Putin publicly, can dine with a dissident, who is anti-Putin publicly, and they can say things that they can only say in private”.⁴²

Many of the people interviewed for this paper described a growing belief that they are under close watch by Russia's intelligence agencies. Whatever the truth, for the Kremlin this is a victory in itself – even if it does not lead to Moscow gaining information, making people paranoid means they start to question or change their behaviour. “Never say anything in private that you wouldn't say in public. And never say anything in public that you wouldn't want the Kremlin to hear”, was a recurring sentiment voiced by interviewees and interlocutors.

4.1 Prominent Russians

One of the most prominent Russians in London is Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Once Russia's richest man, Khodorkovsky accused Putin of not doing enough to combat corruption in a televised meeting in February 2003 – he paid for it by spending the next decade of his life in prison. Since his release in 2013, Khodorkovsky has been convening a kind of government-in-exile; he launched Open Russia in 2014 as a pro-European political platform and funds a network of opposition activists in Russia from the organisation's headquarters in London.

Khodorkovsky maintains a tight-knit team of two dozen or so individuals at Open Russia, and with good reason. A source close to Khodorkovsky explained that Russian intelligence and security operatives have attempted to gain access to every level of his circle – from applying for temporary and permanent positions at Open Russia, to approaching members of his team to join the FSB.⁴³ “We assume there are moles everywhere”, the source said, “and that everything we say and write in the office is heard and read”.

Such a mindset may sound like paranoia, but it is not without reason. In an incident described by the journalist Ben Judah, Khodorkovsky gave a public lecture in February 2015 after which he was asked a question by a Russian expat based in London.⁴⁴ The expat later admitted to Judah that “I was asked to ask Khodorkovsky that question by the FSB”. S/he went on to say that “The FSB provide one-sixth of my funding and I ask questions for them in return.”

Like Khodorkovsky, Vladimir Ashurkov, a former investment banker, is critical of Putin. An ally of Alexey Navalny, Russia's leading opposition activist, Ashurkov fled Russia for the UK in 2014 and was granted political asylum a year later. In Moscow, Ashurkov had been subject to months

⁴¹ Goskrop, V., 'How the Ukraine crisis is affecting Russians in Moscow-on-Thames', *The Guardian*, 6 April 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/06/among-the-russians-in-london>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁴² Interview with Russian opposition figure, July 2018.

⁴³ Interview in London, October 2018.

⁴⁴ Judah, B., 'London beware. Putin sees it all', *The Times*, 8 March 2015.

of being followed by the Kremlin's intelligence and security operatives, largely, he believes, because of his support for Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation. This pressure culminated in a raid of his apartment, in February 2014, which was aired on national television.

Ashurkov estimates that it was around six months after he moved to London that he realised he was still being followed. He explained how:

I had a meeting with a friend in a hotel, a Russian businessman who lives in London but frequently travels to Moscow. We met at a hotel for a coffee. We go way back, perhaps 15 years or so. When he next travelled to Moscow, the following week, he met with some people from the security services. They knew about our meeting, where we met and what we discussed.⁴⁵

Ashurkov is unsure exactly how the Kremlin found out about the meeting, saying "I don't know if it was surveillance, or if they intercepted an SMS, or some other communication". Nevertheless, he, like many others, is now unwilling to take unnecessary risks. "These days, you never know what's inside your computer or mobile phone", he explained, "I assume that all of my emails are intercepted and read".

As Ashurkov and his family settled into life in London, he slowly began to integrate into the Russian expat community. In doing so, he learnt to be vigilant at émigré gatherings – listening out for who was talking about politics, security, and other sensitive topics, aware that they might be informants collecting information and sending it to Moscow. Perhaps reflecting the level of paranoia within London's Russian community, interviewees and interlocutors suggested that anywhere between a quarter and a half of Russian expats were, or have been, informants.

For years, the fulcrum of London's anti-Putin activities was Boris Berezovsky, a billionaire who helped bring Putin to power before spectacularly falling out with him and fleeing to the UK in 2000. He was given political asylum in 2003; much to the frustration of the Kremlin, which sought to have him extradited. Berezovsky and his associates – which included Alexander Litvinenko – were known as the 'London Circle' of Russian exiles. Berezovsky died in 2013, but while he was alive he regularly complained about being followed by Russian operatives. This was not ungrounded bombast – in 2007, UK agencies intercepted an individual, thought to be a Russian national, in London who they believed was intending to assassinate him.⁴⁶

A number of Berezovsky's former associates remain in London, including Akhmed Zakaev. Zakaev was also given political asylum in the UK in 2003, having survived fighting in both Chechen wars in the mid- to late-1990s and early-2000s. The leader of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Zakaev was warned about his personal security by Scotland Yard in 2007⁴⁷ and then, according to MI5, was the subject of an assassination plot, by a Russian national, in London in 2012.⁴⁸

Zakaev described how the activities of Russia's spies in London have affected his day-to-day life. "I used to have a routine", he said, "when and where I would shop, go for coffee, meet friends, and so on. And then I realised that wherever I went there were always people watching me, making notes, listening to my conversations... Now I avoid routines".⁴⁹ In coffee shops, he

⁴⁵ Ashurkov is quoted as having told a similar story to *The New York Times*. See, Barry, E., 'As Putin's Opponents Flocked to London, His Spies Followed', *The New York Times*, 12 March 2018, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/12/world/europe/london-russia-spies.html>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁴⁶ Batty, D. and Oliver, M. 'Police arrest man in Berezovsky 'murder plot'', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2007, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jul/18/russia.internationalcrime>, last visited: 26 October 2018.

⁴⁷ Doward, J., 'Police feared assassination for two Russian dissidents', *The Guardian*, 22 July 2007, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jul/22/russia.world>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁴⁸ Jones, S., 'MI5 warns of plot to assassinate Chechen refugee in UK', *The Guardian*, 1 April 2012, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/apr/01/plot-assassinate-chechen-refugee-uk>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁴⁹ Interview in London, July 2018.

said, “it’s very easy to identify plants. They aren’t with anybody. They don’t talk. They stare, and listen”. For Zakaev, all of this “has become so normal”.

Assassination plots, such as those that targeted Berezovsky and Zakaev, are not a thing of the past. A Russian opposition political figure said that, following the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, s/he had been made aware of a Russian plot to kill her/him.⁵⁰ The plot, s/he was told by contacts in eastern Europe, also involved assassinating another individual – Arkady Babchenko, the Russian journalist and Kremlin critic. On 29 May, Babchenko staged his own death, in Ukraine’s capital Kiev, in order to thwart the effort to kill him.

The opposition figure alerted the UK’s authorities to the plot, and s/he undertook her/his own measures in response. In the weeks and months since, however, s/he has received a number of death threats, including having a funeral wreath delivered to her/his home address. “Now, I am scared for my life.” s/he said. A police investigation led by counter-terrorism officers is understood to be underway.

4.2 Prominent Westerners

Putin’s ‘Enemy No 1’ – according to the sub-title of his own book, at least – is Bill Browder. A hedge fund manager-turned-human rights campaigner, Browder was the boss of Sergei Magnitsky, who was killed in pre-trial detention in Russia in 2009. Magnitsky, a lawyer, had discovered a US\$230 million fraud against the Russian state, using companies belonging to Browder’s Hermitage Capital, perpetrated by a group of Russian police officers – and was jailed after making Russia’s authorities aware of his discovery. Since then, Browder has mounted a non-stop campaign to impose visa sanctions and asset freezes on those responsible for Magnitsky’s death. He has succeeded in the United States, Estonia, the UK, Canada, Lithuania, and Latvia, and is keeping up his relentless campaign to make other countries follow suit.

“At just about every public event I speak at there are always one or two FSB people in the crowd”, says Browder, “You can spot them a mile off”.⁵¹ He described how these people “wouldn’t show the normal human emotions of a story of a man being tortured and murdered. They would just sit there passively, almost counting the time until I was done speaking so that they could ask a question which was always consistent with the Russian government’s position, like my conviction in Russia for tax evasion”. In 2013, a Russian court convicted Browder in absentia of fraud and evading more than RUB522 million (US\$9 million) in taxes, sentencing him to nine years in jail.

If this sounds like a rather obvious attempt to gain intelligence on Browder, then other techniques are similarly so. “Our old office was right across from a coffee shop”, he says, “and they’d [Russia’s intelligence agencies] have a person sitting in the coffee shop all day, watching who comes and goes. And in a number of cases, we have these people photographed – we have photographs of people who are surveying us”.

Browder also believes that Russia has “sent various people to keep tabs on me, pretending to be opposition journalists or just plain pro-Kremlin journalists”. Such people have attempted to engage him in conversation, whether on the street, in restaurants, or at public discussions. Although he cannot be sure, Browder is always aware that those interactions might be recorded or filmed – for use either on TV, in the next hit-job to be aired on Russia’s pro-Kremlin channels, or in court, should he do or say something potentially incriminating.

Another prominent Westerner described regularly seeing a group of two or three men standing for hours on the street where s/he lives in northwest London.⁵² The men speak in Russian and

⁵⁰ Interview in London, October 2018.

⁵¹ Interview in London, July 2018.

⁵² Interview in London, October 2018.

pass the time by peeling and eating sunflower seeds (*semechki*), a common habit amongst Russian men. The same men would sometimes follow her/him during the course of the day, for example on the morning and afternoon ‘school run’, always endeavouring – seemingly – to make it clear that they were undertaking surveillance.

This Westerner, who had business interests in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s and remains active on issues relating to the country, says that s/he was unnerved by this initially, and contacted the police – but these concerns were not taken seriously. It was not so much that there was a resistance to investigate, s/he says, but instead a resistance to countenance that Russian intelligence and security operatives might be active in the city. Such resistance, several interviewees and interlocutors said, has continued since the Skripal poisoning.

Threatening behaviour is commonplace, and it is often more explicit than implicit. “We’ve received a number of emails, text messages, and voicemails threatening death and prison and all sorts of other things”, Browder says. Other interviewees and interlocutors said that they too had received emails and phone calls threatening violence; in the case of the former, from anonymous encrypted email addresses, and in the case of the latter, from withheld telephone numbers.

Browder’s experience also highlights that it is not only Russian spies and their informants who are collecting this material. A great many former civil servants have made the seamless transition from Whitehall to Mayfair, where London’s business intelligence and political risk sector is booming – and individuals connected to the Magnitsky affair have taken advantage of this vast network of corporate intelligence-gathering firms. GPW + Co. is a case in point. In 2016, GPW reportedly accepted a £50,000 contract⁵³ to work on behalf of Andrey Pavlov, a Russian lawyer who, US prosecutors say, worked with the Russian mafia group that carried out the alleged US\$230 million fraud uncovered by Magnitsky⁵⁴. According to a report by the Daily Beast, Pavlov hired Andrew Fulton, a former high-ranking MI6 spy who was chairman of GPW, to work as a private investigator. Browder says that GPW’s work was, in effect, a “detailed private investigation into my affairs [and] my whereabouts”.

4.3 Elites and Experts

Russia’s intelligence and security agencies are also interested in Britain’s political and policy elites – current and former members of the House of Commons and House of Lords, as well as employees of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, and other Whitehall departments. Gathering intelligence in this regard is straightforward. MPs interested in international affairs, for example, are always on the lookout for ways to bolster their expertise and improve their profiles.

A case in point is the story of Sergey Nalobin. In 2012, Nalobin, who was then first secretary in the Russian embassy’s political section, helped establish a high-profile group called Conservative Friends of Russia. The group attracted the endorsement of senior politicians, held its launch party in the Russian ambassador’s gardens, and even arranged a trip to Russia for some of its members. At the same time, Nalobin, according to the ‘Guido Fawkes’ political blogger Paul Staines, “popped up at any Tory shindig where he could network” – including at the 2014 Conservative Party Summer Party, at the Hurlingham Club in west London.⁵⁵ But the Conservative

⁵³ Weiss, M., ‘Former Top U.K. Spy Now Works for Team Putin and a Mobbed-Up Russian Lawyer’, *The Daily Beast*, 24 April 2016, available at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/04/24/former-top-u-k-spy-now-works-for-team-putin-and-a-mobbed-up-russian-lawyer.html>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁵⁴ ‘United States of America vs. Prevezon Holdings’, *United States District Court Southern District of New York* (2013), available at: <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/usao-sdny/legacy/2015/03/25/U.S.%20v%20Prevezon%20et%20al.%20Complaint.pdf>, last visited: 19 October 2018, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Staines, P., ‘The Russian Spy who went to all the Tory parties’, *The Spectator*, 17 March 2018, available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/03/the-russian-spy-who-went-to-all-the-tory-parties/>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

Friends of Russia was not what it seemed. Nor was Nalobin. The former turned out to be a Kremlin influence operation, while the latter was intimately connected to the FSB.⁵⁶

Beyond Nalobin-style lobbying, there is regular covert spookery too. What Russia wants is accurate and well-informed analysis about the UK's domestic, foreign, security, economic, and energy policies. It is interested in who is up and who is down in YouGov's latest political poll, what ComRes says are the main issues dividing society, and what IPSOS Mori has discovered the public want from their government. But the Kremlin knows that no matter how many analysts it has squirreling away in Moscow, they cannot fully understand why the UK government – or other Western governments – act the way they do solely by using open-source intelligence (which, incidentally, Putin is notorious for not believing anyway); that is why it needs on-the-ground, off-the-record information, ideally from people within the machinery of government or close to it.

In attempting to gain such information, Russia's agents employ a number of tactics, one of which follows a rather simple playbook.⁵⁷ A plausible scenario, described by a number of current and former Government officials, is that a Whitehall official attends a high-level, closed-door event in the City. Attendees, as well as making polite conversation, exchange business cards, to the point where almost everybody has spoken with everybody else and most have exchanged business cards. When the Kremlin needs some information, one of the individuals who swapped cards with the official will reactivate the contact, seeking a meeting. When the two individuals meet, most likely at a café or bar, efforts to gather intelligence begin.

One Whitehall official described how, having been through this playbook at an event on Western sanctions policy towards Russia, s/he met a lady for coffee in Mayfair who worked for a large Russian bank with offices in the City:

She had a notepad with her, the first page of which was a list of pre-prepared questions – in badly-written English – and she just read them one by one. 'From which universities does the government recruit most of its staff?'. 'Who are the key thinkers on Russia that the civil service engages with?'. 'What are the main factors motivating the decisions taken by the Government?'. 'How is Russia viewed in the UK?' and so on.⁵⁸

In one sense, the lady's behaviour, including the questions she asked, was entirely legitimate. It was only after the official raised the meeting with her/his superiors that a security check uncovered the lady's links to Russia's intelligence and security agencies.

It is not only current Whitehall officials that interest Russia, either. Former officials, particularly those recently freed from the shackles of government bureaucracy, can be just as useful. The Kremlin sees these individuals as key targets. They will be aware of the latest government plans, likely possess commercially sensitive information, and know individuals (both inside and outside Whitehall) whom the Kremlin might be able to compromise. Those who have worked in intelligence may have even more valuable information – operational details of SIS missions in Russia, the names of UK spies and Russian double agents, and details of British spying techniques.

The Kremlin is also interested in London's expert community: the small group of academics, commentators, journalists, and think tankers who are professional 'Russia-watchers' and who, collectively, help shape the way Russia is viewed in the UK.

⁵⁶ Harding, L., 'Tory blushes deepen over activities of Conservative Friends of Russia', *The Guardian*, 30 November 2012, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/nov/30/activities-of-conservative-friends-of-russia>, last visited: 19 October 2018; Sergey's father, Nikolai Nalobin, was a KGB general who went on to be a major figure in the FSB. In 2015, Nalobin had his permission to stay in Britain suddenly revoked. See, Harding, L., 'How Kremlin got diplomats to woo Tories', *The Guardian*, 30 November 2012, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/nov/30/kremlin-orders-diplomats-cooperation-conservatives>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁵⁷ Interview with former Government official, June 2018.

⁵⁸ Conversation in London, August 2018.

Russia's operatives try to become confidants or trusted sources of the experts, or at the very least their acquaintances. They are hoping to be invited to the latest closed-door roundtable session that takes place at a think tank, or an off-the-record discussion at a private members' club. Topics for discussion can range from the future of the Western sanctions regime to the West's likely responses to Moscow's most recent foreign policy adventure. The Kremlin wants to know what is being said and by whom, in case it needs to make a snap judgment about what the UK, or West, will do in a moment of crisis.

Often, Russia's operatives will pose as opposition activists or journalists in order to gain access; for all the expertise that London's Russia-watchers have, it is impossible to keep on top of who is in and who is out in Russia's factious opposition struggles - and therefore who is currently pro- and anti-Putin. As discussed above, these operatives will also use diplomatic cover and pose as officials - Russian intelligence knows that what the experts crave most is access to insider information. One think tanker said:

It's quite obvious when the Embassy's staff have rotated and there's a new spy in town. He or she will turn up unannounced at our offices and ask for a meeting. I'll usually send him or her away, but they'll quickly follow up by email to arrange a meeting. But the same afternoon he or she will do the same thing to other think tanks - call in unannounced and ask for a meeting.

Another think tanker explained how it was not 'agents' but 'informants' that s/he had mostly experienced. But it is not only about gaining access to the Russia-watchers, however. It is also about co-opting them. This way, the Kremlin hopes it can muffle or silence some of the more critical voices on Russia.

5. Conclusions

Westminster and Whitehall should be under no illusions about the activities of Russia's intelligence and security agencies in the UK. While it is the assassinations and attempted assassinations that garner the spotlight, these are simply the tip of the iceberg. Russia is engaged in all manner of activities associated with active measure - the subversive, political warfare originally employed by the KGB during the Cold War - including espionage. And the UK seems ill-equipped to deal with these.

To be fair, since March 2018 the UK government has introduced a number of new measures to combat Russia's behaviour. The updated 'Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill', which is currently being read in Parliament, grants authorities the power "to stop, question, search, and detain people at ports and borders to determine whether they appear to be (or have been) engaged in hostile activity".⁵⁹ The Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI), a government initiative with links to MI5, has intensified the work it does educating the public on espionage, and the National Cyber Security Centre, which is part of Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), has signalled that it is increasingly willing to publicly attribute responsibility to Russia for malicious cyber activities.

Furthermore, the UK government has signalled its intention to make use of a range of powers at its disposal - both old and new. In March 2018, Amber Rudd, the then Home Secretary, announced that her department was looking at how Russians who had secured Tier 1 (Investor) visas had acquired their wealth. The same month, Prime Minister Theresa May announced that the government would support a so-called 'Magnitsky Amendment' to the 'Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act', which received Royal Assent in May. The Amendment gives UK authorities the ability to target human rights abusers with visa bans and asset freezes. The National Crime Agency, meanwhile, has stepped up its efforts to crackdown on illicit wealth through the use of 'Unexplained Wealth Orders', which were introduced under the 'Criminal Finances Act' of 2017.

But more must be done. For London, together with other Western capitals, the challenge is to demonstrate to Moscow that its aggressive intelligence activities abroad have a major cost - in the hope that this may lead Russia to take a more cautious approach or, if not, at least decrease Russia's capabilities in the short- to medium-term and thereby decrease the risk to life.

There are a number of policy recommendations which follow from the conclusions that this paper draws:

- **The UK government should adopt a zero-tolerance approach to Russian intelligence operations on its territory.**

There is a debate as to how the UK government should respond to the activities of Russia's intelligence and security agencies given the Kremlin's propensity for tit-for-tat retaliation. Yet, Downing Street should not be held hostage by this risk; President Vladimir Putin's retaliation is rarely predictable, and rarer still proportionate. Nor should it be held hostage by a desire to improve relations with Moscow; or - to use the words of Theresa May, then Home Secretary, in July 2013 when she explained the government's opposition to holding a public inquiry into the death of Alexander Litvinenko - allow "international relations" to influence its response.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ 'Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill: Commons remaining stages', *UK Parliament*, 11 September 2018, available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2018/june/commons-counter-terrorism-and-border-security-bill/>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁶⁰ 'Theresa May: international relations a factor in not holding Litvinenko inquiry', *Press Association*, 19 July 2013, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jul/19/theresa-may-alexander-litvinenko-inquiry>, last visited: 25 October 2018.

Instead, the UK should respond firmly and publicly to all Russian intelligence operations on its territory. As well as expelling individuals, the UK should also be prepared to take action against the institutions that facilitate them. If, for example, the UK were to expel for spying an individual who used the cover of being a journalist, then the government should also penalise the outlet providing the cover. In this instance, such penalties might include reducing the number of the outlet's journalists who are accredited to the Lobby and Press Gallery, revoking the outlet's accreditation for parliamentary broadcasting, and requesting Ofcom, the broadcasting regulator, to review whether the outlet is "fit and proper" to hold a licence.

- **The UK government should be more open about Russian intelligence and security operations on UK soil.**

Russia uses its intelligence and security agencies as part of a broad and malevolent effort to undermine the UK. This effort involves the use of assassins just as much as it does hackers, lobbyists, politically-connected business executives, consultants, journalists, and students. Its activities highlight the need for the UK to defend itself, often against people who appear to be no threat. One of the first steps toward doing this is to increase public awareness.

There are lessons to be learnt from our Western allies. Since 1998, Estonia's Internal Security Service (Kaitsepolitseiamet, or Kapo) has published an annual report on state security which exposes Russia's operating methods, and names people and organisations suspected of contacts with Russian intelligence.⁶¹ The Czech Republic's Security Information Service (BIS) has produced comparable reports since 2003,⁶² while Poland's Internal Security Agency (ABW) also does similar.

But it is not only about annual reports. It is also about winning the broader information war. According to a YouGov poll conducted in late March 2018, 75% of Britons said Russia was behind the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal.⁶³ But over the following months, as authorities went silent on the progress of their investigation, public opinion began to waver.⁶⁴ Such uncertainty was, at least in part, likely because the UK government was less quick and open in its revelations than, for example, the Dutch government when it apprehended four GRU officers attempting to hack the OPCW (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) in April 2018.

- **The UK government should be willing to downgrade intelligence materials for public consumption.**

There is a difficult balance to reach in the intelligence world - between releasing enough information in order to convince your own population (as well as that of your allies) of the existence of a threat, and releasing too much information such that your adversary is able to establish how you collected that information. Nevertheless, where possible, the UK government should be willing to downgrade intelligence materials for public consumption as and when the occasion demands it.

⁶¹ Weiss, M., 'The Estonian Spymasters', *Foreign Affairs*, 3 June 2014, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-europe/2014-06-03/estonian-spymasters>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁶² 'Annual Reports', *Security Information Service*, available at: <https://www.bis.cz/annual-reports/>, last visited: 25 October 2018.

⁶³ More concerning, 5% of Britons said that Russia was probably or definitely not behind the poisoning of the Skripals. See, 'Eurotrack: Europeans overwhelmingly suspect Russia was behind the Salisbury poisoning', *YouGov UK*, 3 April 2018, available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2018/04/03/eurotrack-europeans-overwhelmingly-suspect-russia-/>, last visited: 25 October 2018.

⁶⁴ Barry, E. 'At Site of U.K. Poisoning, Doubts About Case Creep In', *The New York Times*, 16 June 2018, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/16/world/europe/uk-skripal-russia-salisbury-propaganda.html>, last visited: 25 October 2018.

This is what Downing Street did on 5 September 2018 through two speeches – the first by Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, National Lead for Counter Terrorism Policing with the Metropolitan Police,⁶⁵ and the second by Prime Minister Theresa May – about the Skripal poisoning. Through those speeches, the government released key information about the case they had compiled against the two key suspects – information that was enough to bring charges against them, and issue domestic and European arrest warrants.

The speeches also served two additional purposes. First, they helped make the case for increased public awareness of Russia’s activities in the UK. Second, they embarrassed the Kremlin, given the level of detail that was revealed about the operation to assassinate Sergei Skripal. In turn, of course, both of these were given a significant boost by the revelations of the investigative journalism platform Bellingcat.

- **The UK government should rethink the ‘Warnings Index’ used by the British Embassy in Moscow to identify Russian citizens who deserve greater ‘due diligence’ in their visa applications.**

The two chief suspects in the murder of Litvinenko – Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitry Kovtun – both applied for visas to enter the UK through the British Embassy in Moscow. In spite of the fact that Lugovoi had previously worked for the KGB and FPS, the Entry Clearance Officer (ECO) who dealt with his application said that the Warnings Index recorded him as having “No Trace”.⁶⁶ Had the Index alerted him to Lugovoi’s past career, the officer said it “might have influenced” that questions Lugovoi was asked at his visa interview.

The Warnings Index dates from the 1990s and the Government has announced that it intends to replace it in March 2019.⁶⁷ The new system clearly needs to be better resourced than the existing one – not only is it clearly out of date and unfit for purpose⁶⁸, it also fails to take into account the ‘full spectrum’ nature of Russia’s foreign policy and therefore the range of individuals who pose a security threat to the UK.

The ECOs at the British Embassy who deal with visa applications – and who rely, in turn, on the UK Border Agency’s International Group – are, in some senses, the first line of defence against Russia’s malign activities in the UK. They are too few in number; according to a source with knowledge of the Embassy’s inner workings, within recent years there have been as few as three ECOs. In addition, Border Force officers – who work for the Border Agency and who are responsible for managing ports of entry to the UK – are the second such line of defence. They are also too few in number, lack training, and are inconsistent in how they deal with non-EEA (European Economic Area) migrants coming to the UK.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ ‘Counter-terrorism police release images of two suspects in connection with Salisbury attack’, *Metropolitan Police*, 5 September 2018, available at: <http://news.met.police.uk/news/counter-terrorism-police-release-images-of-two-suspects-in-connection-with-salisbury-attack-320534>, last visited: 19 October 2018.

⁶⁶ ‘The Litvinenko Inquiry: Report into the death of Alexander Litvinenko’, *HM Government* (2016), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/493860/The-Litvinenko-Inquiry-H-C-695-web.pdf, last visited: 19 October 2018, p.118.

⁶⁷ ‘The UK border: Issues and challenges for government’s management of the border in light of the UK’s planned departure from the European Union’, *National Audit Office* (2017), available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-UK-border.pdf>, last visited: 19 October 2018, p.15.

⁶⁸ In a report published in December 2015 that reviewed the Warning Index between 2003 and 2015, the *National Audit Office* found that the system broke down twice a week, forcing frontline staff to rely on incomplete intelligence when determining whether individuals should be allowed into the UK. See, ‘Home Office: E-borders and successor programmes’, *National Audit Office*, 7 December 2015, available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/E-borders-and-successor-programmes.pdf>, last visited: 25 October 2018.

⁶⁹ ‘An inspection of Border Force operations at Gatwick Airport (South Terminal) September – December 2016’, *Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration*, July 2017, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/631661/An-inspection-of-Border-Force-operations-at-Gatwick.pdf, last visited: 25 October 2018.

- **The UK government should enhance capacity-sharing, counterintelligence activities, and coordination with its Western allies.**

Russia's intelligence operations are part of a full spectrum approach to foreign policy.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the West's response to Russia's actions cannot be silo-ed or divided along nation-state boundaries. Much tactical knowledge and expertise about Russia's intelligence and security agencies is already shared through the EU and NATO, and through bilateral and other channels. But more should be done. Enhanced capacity-sharing and counterintelligence activities are essential if any Western action against Russia is going to be meaningful.

For far too long, Russia's aggressive activities overseas were seen through the prism of bilateral relations. Its cyberattacks on Estonia in 2007, the argument went, were an issue between Moscow and Tallinn. Its war with Georgia in 2008 resulted from a clash of personalities between Putin and the hot-headed Mikheil Saakashvili. This belied the fact that Russia was menacing the West as a whole. Belatedly, this has begun to change, particularly since Russia's annexation of Crimea in early 2014.

One of the main differences between the UK's response to the murder of Litvinenko and the poisoning of the Skripals was the extent to which it was able to convince its allies to also respond. In 2007, the UK expelled four Russian diplomats and its allies did nothing. In March 2018, the UK expelled 23 undeclared intelligence officers, and 26 other countries expelled more than 120 suspected intelligence officers from Russia's embassies on their territories. NATO also expelled seven officials from Russia's mission at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels. If there is now a common understanding of the threat Russia poses, then it is essential that there is a coordinated response to its activities.

⁷⁰ Seely MP, B., 'A Definition of Contemporary Russian Conflict: How Does The Kremlin Wage War?', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2016), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-Definition-of-Contemporary-Russian-Conflict-new-branding.pdf>, last visited: 19 October 2018.



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By: Dr Andrew Foxall

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