

Is Nord Stream 2 the Bigger Target?

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Russian Spy Poison Attack: Is Nord Stream 2 the Bigger Target?

By Finian Cunningham

March 12, 2018 "[Information Clearing House](#)" - The mysterious apparent murder bid on an ex-Russian spy in Britain has taken on a wider European dimension.

Predictably, the incident was used to whip up anti-Russian claims in the British media. But, in addition, the European Union soon came under pressure to show “solidarity” with Britain in the supposed Russian assault on its sovereignty.

Former British officials were reported bemoaning the lack of solidarity from EU states over the alleged Russian violation on British soil. The EU then responded with an obligatory statement of “solidarity” with Britain, with the tacit acceptance of Russian malfeasance at play.

The allegations of Russian state involvement in the apparent lethal poisoning of exiled Kremlin agent Sergei Skripal in England last Sunday have been leveled with deplorable disregard for due legal process.

Within hours of the incident – which saw 66-year-old Skripal and his adult daughter rushed to intensive hospital care – British media were speculating that Russian agents had carried out a revenge assassination attempt.

Skripal was exiled from Russia in 2010 after being convicted for treason as a double agent for Britain’s foreign intelligence service MI6. He was living in the southern English town of Salisbury, where he was found paralyzed in a public park along with his 33-year-old daughter.

British counter-terrorism officers have disclosed that the pair were victims of a toxic nerve agent attack, without identifying the chemical used. They have claimed that the attacker or attackers must have been state-sponsored to carry out such a lethal operation. British police have not yet specified any particular agency for the attack,

but as noted the British media quickly jumped to reckless speculation of Russian involvement. The speculation has been fueled by government ministers like Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson using innuendo.

Russia's Foreign Ministry dismissed the allegations of Moscow's involvement as "more irresponsible Russophobia".

The notion that Russia would carry out a risky operation on the eve of its presidential elections this month in order to avenge a disgraced former spy who had been living openly in England for the past eight years defies credibility. It's frankly absurd given the already heightened anti-Russia hysteria in the Western media that the Kremlin would even contemplate such a scheme.

Nevertheless, the evidence does point to an assassination attempt on Skripal using a military-grade chemical weapon. Senior British toxicologist Dr Alistair Hay told Radio Free Europe this week that the chemical substance used in the attack was most likely one of the organophosphate poisons, such as soman or tabun, which are related to sarin and VX. These are nerve agents that can kill from exposure of human skin to a single droplet.

Hay, who is an advisor to the British government on chemical warfare agents, cautioned against rushing to accusations against Russia. "In my view, it's much, much too early to point a finger at anybody at this stage," said the expert.

All that the internationally respected toxicologist would venture to say is that the nature of the attack had "military capability" because of the extreme lethality of the substances involved.

If we assume that Russia was not involved – which is a fair assumption given the above reasoning – then the question is: what state agency could have carried it out? For what objective?

In particular, focus is drawn here to agencies which are seeking to sabotage Europe-wide relations with Russia. As noted above, one of the ramifications from the anti-Russian allegations over the poisoning incident was prompt pressure on the EU to show a tough response towards Moscow.

Former British ambassador to Russia, Sir Tony Brenton, reportedly accused the rest of Europe of lacking in support for Britain.

"The European Union will once again fail to help the UK in its fight against Russia after a former Russian spy was allegedly poisoned in Salisbury, according to former ambassador Sir Tony Brenton," reported the Daily Express.

Another former British foreign office advisor claimed that because of the EU's bitter wrangling with Britain over the Brexit "the Kremlin was taking advantage of the UK's lack of allies in the US and EU, and its inability to do much about the Skripal case".

This logic implicating Russia is unhinged. But the telling aspect is the seeming intended effect of embroiling Europe in a wider antagonistic response to Moscow.

Admittedly, the following discussion here is speculative. But it's worth a posit.

Last week, the US-led political campaign to scupper the Russia-EU Nord Stream 2 project was given renewed impetus.

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The \$11 billion, 1,200-kilometer gas delivery pipeline is nearing completion next year.

Foreign ministers from Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia were in Washington DC to meet with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on the specific subject of the Nord Stream 2, and how it might be cancelled, reported Voice of America.

Poland and the Baltic states are advocating for US supply of gas to replace the traditional European source from Russia. The issue is of huge strategic importance. US President Trump has been vocal in his support for the European states switching to American gas exports, even though that would work out much more expensive for European consumers.

The Nord Stream 2 project is a partnership between Russian state-owned Gazprom and five private energy companies from Britain, Germany, France and Netherlands.

But the project has been buffeted by the political repercussions over allegations against Russia concerning Ukraine, Crimea and purported “interference” in US and European elections.

The German and Austrian governments are strong backers of the new gas network with Russia. Last week, Austrian President Sebastian Kurz was in Moscow where he met with Vladimir Putin and expressed his support for the Nord Stream 2.

However, apart from Poland and the Baltic states which are marked by vehement anti-Russian ideological politics, there are also elements with the EU administration which are similarly opposed to the Nord Stream supply. It is claimed, they say, that such an arrangement will give too much leverage to Moscow over European affairs. Such advocates tend to be pro-NATO and pro-Washington.

The point is that the campaign to undermine the Russian-EU gas partnership has come with renewed impetus – as seen in the delegation last week to Washington by the Polish and Baltic government ministers. Of course, they are pushing at an open door. American state interests are wedded to the objective of knocking out Russia as Europe’s gas supplier.

Now then, the timing of an assassination bid in England which is framed on Russia comes at a convenient moment in the strategic tussle over Europe’s global energy market. It seems significant that pressure is being brought to bear on the EU “to get tough” on Moscow over the alleged attempted murder of the exiled Russian spy. The “get tough” response being sought could be cancellation of the Nord Stream 2 gas project.

If that stands up as a motive for the latest attempt to cleave EU-Russian relations, then our focus on the likely perpetrators shifts to the following: American state agents, possibly working with British and Eastern European accomplices, in trying to kill Sergei Skripal and his daughter, with the purpose of blackballing Moscow.

Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. He is a Master’s graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge,

England, before pursuing a career in newspaper journalism. He is also a musician and songwriter. For nearly 20 years, he worked as an editor and writer in major news media organisations, including *The Mirror*, *Irish Times* and *Independent*.

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