

British Media Restarts Push for Regime Change in Russia

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sky news screenshot

The alleged poisoning of ex-MI6 agent Sergei Skripal has caused the Russophobic MSM to go into overdrive. Nowhere is the desperation with which the Skripal case has been seized more obvious than the Guardian. Luke Harding is spluttering incoherently about a [weapons lab that might not even exist anymore](#). Simon Jenkins gamely takes up his position as the only rational person left at the Guardian, before being heckled in the comments and dismissed as a contrarian by Michael White on twitter. More and more the media are becoming a home for dangerous, aggressive, confrontational rhetoric that has no place in sensible, adult newspapers.

For example, [Mark Rice-Oxley's column](#) in today's Guardian:

Oh, Russia! Even before we point fingers over poison and speculate about secret agents and spy swaps and pub food in Salisbury, one thing has become clear: Russia appears lost, a global menace, a moral vacuum, a far greater threat than it ever was during the cold war.

Read this. It's from a respected "unbiased", liberal news outlet. It is the worst, most partisan political language I have ever heard, more heated and emotionally charged than even the most fraught moments of the Cold War. It is dangerous to the whole planet, and has no place in our media.

If everything he said in the following article were true, if he had nothing but noble intentions and right on his side, this would still be needlessly polarizing and war-like language.

To make it worse, everything he proceeds to say is a complete lie.

Usually we would entitle these pieces "fact checks", but this goes beyond that. This? This is a reality check.

Its agents pop over for murder and shopping...

FALSE: There's no proof any of this ever happened. There has been no trial in the Litvinenko case. The ["public inquiry" was a farce](#), with no cross-examination of witnesses, evidence given in secret and anonymous witnesses. All of which contravene British law regarding a fair trial.

...even while its crooks use Britain as a 24/7 laundromat for their ill-gotten billions, stolen from compatriots.

TRUE...sort of: Russian billionaires do come to London, Paris, and Switzerland to launder their (stolen) money. Rice-Oxley is too busy with his 2 minutes of hate to interrogate this issue. The reason oligarchs launder their money here...is that WE let them. Oligarchs have been fleeing Russia for over a decade. Why? Because, in Russia, Putin's government has jailed billionaires for tax evasion and embezzling, stripped them of illegally acquired assets and demanded they pay their taxes. That's why you have wanted criminals like Sergei Pugachev doing interviews with Luke Harding, complaining he's down to [his "last 270 million"](#).

Empty threats won't worry Russia. Britain needs a better approach

Mark Rice-Oxley



The threat posed by the Kremlin can be reduced if Britain refuses to handle its dirty money and takes on a PR offensive



Screenshot from The Guardian

When was the last time a British billionaire was prosecuted for financial crimes? Mega-Corporations owe [literally billions in tax](#), and our government lets them get away with it.

Its digital natives use their skills not for solving Russia's own considerable internal problems but to subvert the prosperous adversaries that it secretly envies.

FALSE: Russiagate is a farce, [anyone with an open-mind can see that](#). The reference to Russians envying the west is childish and insulting. The 13, just thirteen, Russians who were indicted by Mueller have no connection to the Russian government, [and allegedly campaigned for many candidates](#), and both for and against Trump. They are a PR firm, nothing more.

It bought a World Cup,

FALSE: The World Cup bids are voted on, and after years and years of investigation the US/UK teams have found so little evidence of corruption in the Russia bid that they simply stopped talking about it. If the FBI had found even the slightest hint of financial malpractice, would we ever have stopped hearing about it?

...invaded two neighbours...

False: A European Union investigation found that [Georgia was to blame for the start of the \(very brief, very humiliating\) Russo-Georgian war](#). It lasted a week. That a week-long conflict started by the other side is evidence of “global threat” in a world where Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya have happened is beyond hypocritical...it is delusional.

Regarding the second “neighbour”: Ukraine. Ukraine and Russia are not at war. Ukraine has claimed to have been “invaded” by Russia many times...but has never declared war. Why? Because they rely on Russian gas to live, and because they know that if Russia were to ever REALLY invade, the war would last only just a bit longer than the Georgian one. The [“anti-terrorist operation” in Ukraine](#) was started by the coup government in 2014. Since that time over 10,000 people have died. The vast majority killed by the governments mercenaries and far-right militias...many of whom [espouse outright fascism](#).

...bombed children to save a butcher in the Middle East.

MISLEADING: The statement is trying to paint Russia/Assad as deliberately targeting children, which is clearly untrue. Russia is operating in Syria in full compliance with international law. Unlike literally everybody else bar Iran. When Russia entered the conflict, at the invitation of the legitimate Syrian government, Jihadists were winning the war. ISIS had huge swathes of territory, al-Qaeda affiliates had strongholds in all of Syria’s major cities. Syria was on the brink of collapse. Rice-Oxley is unclear whether or not he thinks this is a good thing.

Today, ISIS is obliterated, [Aleppo is free](#) and the war is almost over. Apparently Syria becoming another Libya is preferable to a secular government winning a war against terrorists and US-backed mercenaries.

And now it wants to start a new nuclear arms race.

FALSE: America started the arms race when they pulled out of the anti-ballistic missile treaty. [Putin warned at the time it was a dangerous move](#). America then moved their [AEGIS “defense shield” into Eastern Europe](#). Giving them the possibility of first-strike without retaliation. This is an untenable position for any country. [Putin warned, at the time](#), that Russia would have to respond. They have responded. Mr Rice-Oxley should take this up with Bush and Cheney if he has a problem with it.

And before the whataboutists say, “America does some of that stuff too”, that may be true, but just because the US is occasionally awful it doesn’t mean that

Russia isn't.

MISLEADING: America doesn't do "some of that stuff". No, America aren't "occasionally awful". They do ALL of that stuff, and have been the biggest destructive force on the planet for over 70 years. Since Putin came to power America has carried out aggressive military operations against Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria. They have sanctioned and threatened and carried out coups against North Korea, Ukraine, Iran, Honduras, Venezuela and Cuba. All that time, the US has also claimed the right to extradite and torture foreign nationals with impunity. The war crimes of American forces and agencies are beyond measure and count.

We are so used to American crimes we just don't see them anymore. Imagine Putin, at one his epic four-hour Q&A sessions, off-handedly admitting to [torturing people in illegal prison camps](#). Would we ever hear the end of it?

Even if you cede the utterly false claim that Russia has "invaded two neighbours", the scale of destruction just does not compare.

Invert the scale of destruction and casualties of Georgia and Iraq. Imagine Putin's government had killed 500,000 people in Georgia alone, whilst routinely condemning the US for a week-long war in Iraq that killed less than 600 people. Imagine Russia kidnapped foreign nationals and tortured them, whilst lambasting America's human rights record.

The double-think employed here is literally insane.

Note to Rice-Oxley and his peers, pointing out your near-delusional hypocrisy is not "whataboutism". It's a standard rhetorical appeal to fairness. If you believe the world shouldn't be fair, fine, but don't expect other people not to point out your double standards.

As for poor little Britain, it seems to take this brazen bullying like a whipping boy in the playground who has wet himself. Boycott the World Cup? That'll teach them!

FALSE: Rice-Oxley is trying to paint a picture of false weakness in order to promote calls for action. Britain has been anything but cooperative with Russia. [British forces operate illegally in Syria](#), they arm and train rebels. They refused to let Russian authorities see the evidence in the Litvinenko case, and refused to let Russian lawyers cross-examine witnesses. Britain's attitude to Russia has been needlessly, provocatively antagonistic for years.

Russians have complained that the portrayal of their nation in dramas such as McMafia is cartoonish and unhelpful, a lazy smear casting an entire nation as a ludicrous two-dimensional pantomime villain with a pocketful of poisonous potions....Of course, the vast majority of Russians are indeed misrepresented by such portrayals, because they are largely innocent in these antics.

TRUE: Russians do complain about this, which is entirely justifiable. The western representation of Russians is ignorant and racist almost without exception. It is an effort, just like Rice-Oxley's column, to demonize an entire people and whip up hatred of Russia so that people will support US-UK warmongering.

Most ordinary Russians are in fact also victims of the power system in their country, which requires ideas such as individual comfort, aspiration, dignity, prosperity and hope to be subjugated to the wanton reflexes of the state

FALSE: Putin's government has decreased poverty by [over 66% in 17 years](#). They have increased life-expectancy, decreased crime, and increased public health. Pensions, social security and infrastructure have all been rebuilt. These are not controversial or debated claims. The Guardian published them itself just a few years ago. That is hardly a state where hope and aspiration are put aside.

Why is Russian power like this: cynical, destructive, zero-sum, determined to bring everything down to a base level where everyone thinks the worst of each other and behaves accordingly?

MISLEADING FALLACY: This is simply projection. There is no logical basis for this statement. He is simply employing the old rhetorical trick of asking WHY something exists, as a way of establishing its existence. This allows the (dishonest) author to sell his own agenda as if it solves a riddle. Before you can explain something, you need to establish an explanandum...something which requires explaining. This is the basic logical process that our dear author is attempting to circumvent. We don't NEED to explain *why* Russian power is like this, because he hasn't yet established that it *is*.

I think there are two reasons. The most powerful political idea in Russia is restoration. A decade of humiliation – economic, social and geopolitical – that followed its rebirth in 1991 became the defining narrative of the new nation.

MISLEADING LANGUAGE: Describing the absolute destruction caused by the fall of the USSR as “rebirth” is an absurd joke. People sold their medals, furniture and keepsakes for food, people froze to death in the streets.

At times, even the continued existence of the Russian Federation appeared under threat.

TRUE: This is true. Russia was in danger of Balkanisation. The possibility of dozens of anarchic microstates, many with access to nuclear weapons, was very real. Most rational people would consider this a bad thing. The achievement of Putin's government in pulling Russia back from the brink should be applauded. Especially when compared with our Western governments who can barely even maintain the functional social security states created by their predecessors. Compare the NHS now with the NHS in 2000, compare Russia's health service now to 17 years ago. Who do you think is really in trouble?

The second reason is that the parlous internal state of Russia – absurdist justice, a threadbare social safety net, a pyramid society in which a very few get very rich and the rest languish – creates moral ambivalence.

PROJECTION:...he actually makes this statement without even a hint of irony. The Tory government has killed people by slashing their benefits, and homeless people froze to death during the recent blizzards. The overall trend of British social structure has been down, for

decades. [Poverty is increasing all the time](#), [food banks](#) are opening and people are increasingly desperate. We are trending down. 20%, one in five British people, [now live in poverty](#).

In that same time, as stated above, Russia's poverty has gone down and down. 13% of Russians live in poverty, almost half the UK rate. In 2014, before we sanctioned Russia, it was only 10%. Even the briefest research would show this. Columnists like Rice-Oxley go out of their way to avoid inconvenient facts.

What is to be done? I wouldn't respond with empty threats, Boris Johnson. No one cares.

Here we come to the centre of the shrubbery maze, up until now the column was just build up. Establishing a "problem" so he can pitch us a "solution".

There are only two weaknesses in this bully's defences. The first is his money. Britain needs to do something about the dodgy Russian billions swilling through its financial system. Make it really hard for Kremlin-connected money to buy football clubs or businesses or establish dodgy limited partnerships; stop oligarchs from raising capital on the London stock exchange. Don't bother with sanctions. Just say: "No thanks, we don't want your business."

FALSE: This shows not even the most basic understanding of the way money works. Money being made in Russia and spent in London is bad for Russia. Sending billionaires back to Russia would inject money INTO the Russian economy. Either Rice-Oxley is actually a moron, or he is being deliberately dishonest.

What he REALLY means is that we should put pressure on the oligarchs, not to the hurt the Russian economy, but in the hopes the oligarchs will turn on Putin and remove him by undemocratic means.

He is pushing for backdoor regime change. And if you think I'm reading too much into this, then here...

The second is public opinion. The imminent presidential election is a foregone conclusion, but the mood in Russia can turn suddenly, as we saw in 1991, 1993 and 2011-2012.

Notice how quickly he dismisses the democratic will of the Russian people. Poor, stupid, "envious" Russians aren't equipped to make their own decisions. We need to step in. "Public opinion" turning means a colour revolution. It means US backed regime change in a nuclear armed super-power. Backed by the cyberwarriors paid to spread Western propaganda online.

Maybe it's time to try some new digital hearts-and-minds operation. In the internet age, Russians have already shown how public opinion can be manipulated. Perhaps our own secret digital marvels can embark on the kind of information counter-offensive to win over the many millions of Russians who share our values. Perhaps they already are.

The hypocrisy is mind-blowing, when I read this paragraph I was dumb-founded. Speechless. For months we've been hearing about how terrible Russia is for allegedly interfering in the American election. Damaging democracy with reporting true news out of context and some well placed memes.

Our response? Our defense of our "values"? Use the armies of online propagandists our governments employ - [their existence](#) was [reported in the Guardian](#) - in order to undermine, or undo the democratic will of the Russian people. Rice-Oxley is positing this with a straight face.

Russia is such a destabilising threat to "our democratic values", such a moral vacuum, that we must use subterfuge to undermine their elections and remove their popular head of state.

Rice-Oxley wants to push and prod and provoke and antagonise a nuclear armed power that, at worst, is guilty of nothing but playing our game by our rules and winning. He wants to build a case for war with Russia, and he's doing it on bedrock of cynical lies.

It's all incredibly dangerous. Hopefully they'll realise that before it's too late. For all our sakes.

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