

# The Salisbury Incident. Manipulating Fear, Heightening Hysteria of a Russian Threat. The Need for a Genuine Anti-war Movement

By [Johnny Gaunt](#) and [Harry Rogers](#)

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*As many governments across the Western world begin to exile their Russian diplomats back east, the most fundamental questions relating to the Skripal case remain not only unanswered, but the faintest sniff of any real evidence is yet to make an appearance before the public.*

There is no doubt that Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Amber Rudd, et al, have worked hard to achieve a consensus amongst NATO and EU states, and has had some success in persuading other leaders to condemn and react to the unproven Russian involvement.

Many of these leaders, perhaps, have reasons of their own for latching on to such a flimsy agreement. France, Germany, Italy, and Holland are among a number of nations reeling from their own domestic political turbulence. Collapsing centrist parties have watched their traditional voter bases divide and file off to the left and right, as all over Europe the political polarisation hardens. Being seen to be part of a new unified front will, they hope, strengthen their domestic positions. It is a familiar response from desperate neoliberal administrations; instead of taking responsibility for the declining interest in their policies, they would rather fall back on the policy of fear in a dangerous attempt to appear 'strong and stable'.

Manipulating fear of a common enemy of the West, brings with it certain benefits for the ruling classes. Not only does it present a superficial 'toughness' that leaders can exploit at home, it also makes large sections of the public easier to control and susceptible to further misinformation. Chomsky suggested:

"Democratic societies can't force people [to go to war, in this case]. Therefore, they have to control what they think."

You could also finish that sentence, "Therefore, democracy must be undermined."

With the Skripal case we have seen the UK mass media swing into action in order to ramp up public fear, obliterate individual analysis and control the narrative of how Brits, loyal to their country, *should* respond. The BBC, ITN and Channel4 News outlets have each backed Theresa May's assumptions and reactionary behaviour towards Russia. Jeremy Corbyn's perspective, that the government needs to wait until real facts emerge about who is responsible, has been purposefully vilified and distorted by these networks, to echo George Bush's infamous, "You're either with us, or against us," mentality. The BBC, for their flagship

political debate programme, *Newsnight*, even went so far as to alter Jeremy Corbyn's flat-cap to look more like a Russian bearskin, before pasting the doctored image onto a deep red backdrop of the Kremlin.

Heightening hysteria of a Russian threat is *win-win* politics for many hawkish MPs, who will gain increases in their arms industry share profits, and political leverage to turn up Defence spending. Simultaneously, the shrill is loud enough to drown out domestic criticism of such scandalous acts as cutting free school meals for a million kids from struggling families.

Of course, the main driver of much of this remains ideology. The golden rule of the British establishment has long been to stamp out any sign of socialism long before it can develop into anything meaningful; and it has done an excellent job since destroying Michael Foot's 1983 manifesto.

It has been a long 35 years for the principled socialist. But in that time, things have changed radically. The commercial scraps from military technology found their way into public homes in the form of computers around the same time. Within 10 years, the world-wide-web had organised the internet into something accessible by the new generation, for whom computers were as everyday as television. In 2005, one of this generation, began hooking up Ivy League universities to his social media software, *Facebook*. The use of social media data by companies such as *Cambridge Analytica* to subvert global democratic processes is a negative outcome of the growth of ICT. Whilst *big-data* is a worrying aspect of the growth in digital industry, the ongoing rush by both Google and the Chinese government to bring about the singularity in artificial intelligence, where machines are equal in intellectual ability with human beings, is even more worrying for those of us concerned about the future of militarism. We are told that there are great social benefits that flow from AI, but the thought of autonomous weaponry making decisions on who lives and dies in the many so-called theatres of war is truly scary, and no longer just the dystopian rambling of science-fiction writers.

Whatever the truth behind the Salisbury Incident, we have witnessed the UK establishment's completely cynical exercise in ramping up public fear of war, through the demonization of a major state. This behaviour is nothing new and has been used unsparingly since the end of the second world war; however, since 2001 and the commencement of the War on Terror, this fear and war mongering has intensified and become more frequent. These are the desperate actions of an ideologically bankrupt set of inept politicians; and, they are not exclusive to the Tory Party.

However, the establishment's persistent use of its mainstream media arm to concuss the public into consensus, appears to be losing some of its punching power. This has been in no small part due to Jeremy Corbyn's consistent message of doing the *right thing*, as in this case where he urged restraint before rushing to judgement. Nevertheless, the governments in NATO, will continue to use the threat of war to justify increasing expenditure on more and more technologically sophisticated methods of arm's length killing, mostly of the dispossessed, in countries that don't, or seem unlikely to, conform to Western hegemonic ideology.

Prevailing *facts* surrounding incidents such as the Salisbury poisoning, become almost irrelevant once the narrative has been set out; the public simply needs to choose between *loyalty to*, or *betrayal of*, Britain. Manipulation of public opinion in this way will no

doubt carry on until it is either *fully* exposed for what it is, or until a genuine anti-war government can turn us away from the 'unavoidable' conflicts we are purposefully being steered towards.

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*Johnny Charles and Harry Rogers are both members of the Labour Party and Ceredigion Stop the War. On 28<sup>th</sup> April, the panel event, "Why the UK needs a new Foreign Policy" will take place in Aberystwyth, and will feature talks from Mark Serwotka, Lindsey German, Adam Joannes & Ayla Gol.*

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