RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE EU

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RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE EU
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AM: Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, and other NATO allies have all said that Russia was responsible for the nerve attack in Salisbury. Were you?

VC: Highly likely they said….Russia – and I can assure you without using the phraseology like ‘highly likely’ which has become very popular these days – Russia had nothing to do with it.

AM: Boris Johnson, the Foreign Secretary, has gone even further, and he said that it is very, very likely that Vladimir Putin himself ordered this attack.

VC: Well, that rests with the responsibility of Boris Johnson, who I believe is acting in an inappropriate manner, which doesn’t give him credit.

AM: This was an attack on a man widely regarded in Russia as a traitor, using a chemical agent regarded as being made in Russia. And that is why many people in Britain say it is overwhelmingly likely the Russians must have been responsible. And if not the Russians, who?

VC: Well, this whole case is based on assumptions, based on suspicions, fuelled by emotions. You rightly referred to Mr Skripal as a traitor, as a defector, but you know, I can assure you that he’s almost forgotten in Russia. He has been living in Britain for eight years now. Before that - I think I should stress the point – he was officially pardoned by presidential decree. Which means that whatever one can think of him in the moral sense, but from the legal point of view the Russian state had nothing against him.
And also that his daughter Yulia is a Russian citizen. That’s why among the many violations by the British authorities in this case, I will cite that it is a blatant violation of the bilateral consular convention by not allowing Russian diplomats and consular officials access to a Russian citizen currently in hospital.

AM: And the Russian state has now announced criminal investigations into the attempted murder of Yulia Skripal, and indeed Mr Glushkov as well. Can I ask, as part of that investigation whether the Russian authorities will be seeking access to the nerve agent and to the police who were involved in the case?

VC: Certainly the Russian investigative committee will request cooperation from the British authorities according to international law and existing bilateral agreements. Actually, the Russian side, through the embassy in London, requested access to evidence, if any, if there is any, to the nerve agent from the very beginning, from the first day, but was flatly refused. In spite of that being Britain’s obligation on the basis of the international convention on prohibition of chemical weapons.

AM: This is a very obscure nerve agent, not much understood around the world. Has Russia ever produced this agent, Novichok?

VC: No.

AM: Never?

VC: No. Actually Russia has stopped production of any chemical agents back in 1992. So we cannot even talk about any chemical agents produced by Russia. All that have been produced previously was produced by the Soviet Union. In 1992 the then President, Boris Yeltsin, signed a decree stopping all production, and on – according to the international convention on prohibition of chemical weapons last year, 2017, Russia destroyed all its stockpiles. There is only one country today which hasn’t done so,
which is still retaining its chemical stockpiles, and that is the United States of America.

AM: Can I be absolutely clear then, Russia has no stockpiles of any nerve agents whatever?
VC: Indeed. No stockpiles whatsoever.

AM: So then there is the question how did this agent come to be used in Salisbury? It has been suggested, for instance, that during the dissolution of the Soviet Union some of this agent may have been stolen or sold and ended up in the hands of either criminal gangs or other state parties. What’s your view?

VC: Well, why don’t you ask yourself the question why – how can the British authorities so quickly manage to designate the nerve agent used as something called Novichok? It can only mean that they had some standard...

AM: It has a signature, I think. It has a chemical signature.

VC: But when you have a nerve agent or whatever, you check it against certain samples that you retain in your laboratories. And Porton Down, as we now all know, is the largest military facility in the United Kingdom that has been dealing with chemical weapons research. And it’s actually only eight miles from Salisbury.

AM: You’re not suggesting that Porton Down is responsible for this nerve agent?
VC: I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t have any evidence of anything having been used. And of course, I exclude the possibility of any stockpiles of any chemical weapons fleeing Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But there were certain specialists, including scientists who today claim to have been responsible for creating some nerve agent that have been whisked out of Russia.
AM: They defected -
VC: Currently residing in the United Kingdom.
AM: So they defected. They said it was made and that it was tested in Uzbekistan, for instance, and so therefore it was around and could have been stolen, could have been sold on.
VC: I will not comment on their words. But they were involved in certain research of various chemical weapons, yes. In the Soviet years.

AM: In her response, first response, Theresa May has expelled 23 Russian citizens. Were they spies?
VC: Of course not, they were diplomats.

AM: Are there any Russian spies in Britain?
VC: Come on, you are not asking the right person perhaps. Are there any British spies in Russia?

AM: One of the other possibilities that Britain has talked about is the use of the so-called Magnitsky Act to freeze the assets of various people who’ve been using London to wash money through London. Individuals. In some respects I would imagine you would welcome that.
VC: Well, I wouldn’t care about the fate of money being laundered in London, be it Russian or any other origin.

AM: And what about the suggestion that members of the royal family and politicians and so forth won’t come to Russia for the World Cup? The World Cup was going to be a very, very big moment for modern Russia.
VC: Indeed.
AM: Is this a blow to Russia?
VC: Well, I’m sure that those members of the royal family who have been planning to come will be sorry hearing that from their own government.
AM: It’s been a very difficult time in relations between Russia and Britain, a whole series of issues, alleged Russian involvement in elections in Europe and America and Britain as well. Lots of tensions over the Baltic states and Ukraine and so forth. Looking ahead, what do you see for Britain’s relations with Russia after we’ve left the EU?

VC: Well, you know, at one point I said to a British colleague of mine that I was actually looking into a bright future of Russian-British relations after Brexit, because Britain would no longer be confined by EU sanctions or anything like that. Somehow he didn’t support that view.

AM: At this period there is almost universal anger about British-Russian relationships in Britain at the moment. Gavin Williamson –

VC: And in Russia too.

AM: And in Russia too. Gavin Williamson, our new Defence Secretary said recently that Russia is going to be thinking how can we cause so much pain in Britain, damage its economy, rip its infrastructure apart, cause thousands and thousands of deaths, and create total chaos within the UK? That is the perspective of the senior British Minister about your country now.

VC: Well, he also said, if I remember correctly the wording, that Russia should shut up and go away. Let me assure that Russia is not going to shut up and will certainly not go away.

AM: There has been a sort of sense in Britain that Russia was almost mocking us about this terrible attack. Some of your presenters have talked about the British climate being very unhealthy for Russian defectors and people falling out of buildings, and even your President has talked about traitors eating poison and so forth. Almost as if people in Moscow regard this as a funny matter.

VC: It certainly is not a funny matter, and actually the latest news that I heard from Moscow referred to the launch of two criminal investigations by the Russian investigative committee on damage
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... to the health of a Russian citizen, Miss Yulia Skripal, and of the unexplained, mysterious death the day before yesterday of Mr Nikolai Glushkov.

AM: And to be absolutely clear, Russian investigators will come to British police shortly and say, ‘we want access to this investigation, we want to work alongside you when it comes to what happened in Salisbury and we would like to see the nerve agent used and we would like proper access’?

VC: Of course they will, first through correspondence, then perhaps should a personal visit be required then they will come. And actually Russia has offered to cooperate on the Salisbury incident from the very outset. But we didn’t get any answer whatsoever from the Foreign Office or any other government agency.

AM: Ambassador Chizhov, thank you very much indeed for talking to us.

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