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"Every nation, if it is to survive as a nation, must study its own history and have a foreign policy"
—C.J. O'Donnell, The Lordship of the World, 1924, p.145

How the Cold War ended and its consequences today.
Timofey Bordachev p. 2

The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities,

A conversation with Professor John Mearsheimer—Ian Proud p. 3

Statement by The People's Movement on the Comments

by NATO Military Chief p. 4

Has the European Union Built its own Propaganda Machine?
Thomas Fazi p. 5

EU Authoritarianism on the Rise in Hungary The People's Movement p. 6

Address to the Roger Casement 110th Anniversary Commemoration
Jack Lane p. 7

Did UK Intelligence Stage the Salisbury Novichok Attack?
Tim Norman p. 9

Coexistence, American-Soviet Cooperation, Atomic Energy, Europe
Stalin Interview p. 26

Rise of the Men of Iron, Part 5 of 'Unfinished Victory'
Arthur Bryant p. 28

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How the Cold War ended and its Consequences Today.

Timofey Bordachev

Thirty-five years have passed since the dramatic events of August 1991 in Moscow which marked, more clearly than any later declaration or diplomatic ceremony, the end of the era we call the Cold War.

The failed 'August Coup' attempt to preserve the Soviet Union made continuation of the old confrontation impossible given one of its principal participants had effectively left the battlefield. Everything that followed, including the formal dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, merely recorded a change that had already taken place.

The essential fact was that the Soviet Union, and subsequently Russia, could no longer sustain the material and political foundations required to continue the struggle. There were many reasons for this, but foremost among them was the exhaustion of the Soviet model of state governance.

Moscow therefore chose to end the confrontation. This was historically unusual because Russia hadn't been defeated on the battlefield or forced to surrender, and the Cold War ended because of internal political change and a voluntary decision by the Soviet leadership.

Paradoxically, this peaceful ending helped make a future confrontation more likely. The principal reason was simple: the Western powers, led by the United States, regarded the end of the Cold War as a victory, but Russia didn't regard itself as a defeated country. That contradiction became one of the central problems of the post-Cold War order.

Great nuclear powers such as Russia, the United States, and China cannot realistically be defeated militarily without risking mutual destruction, thus the greatest threats to such states therefore tend to come from within through political dysfunction, economic weakness, poor governance, and social instability.

We can see something similar today in the United States. It remains the strongest individual power in the international system, but domestic conflict increasingly limits the effectiveness of its foreign policy. Meanwhile, China places internal stability and development at the center of its strategic thinking precisely because its leaders understand that domestic cohesion ultimately determines external strength.

The same logic shaped the Cold War because once Washington and Moscow accumulated enormous nuclear arsenals, direct military conflict became irrational. The confrontation instead developed according to what George Kennan described as containment in restricting Soviet influence and applying pressure across numerous fronts while avoiding a direct war between the superpowers.

But we shouldn't romanticize this arrangement because the Cold War was still a war in the political sense and the objective of the Soviet Union's adversaries wasn't simply peaceful coexistence, rather it was the containment and ultimately neutralization of their opponent.

From Moscow's perspective, this amounted to a struggle against Russia itself, which at that particular historical moment existed politically and economically in the form of the Soviet state.

West remembers 1991 Soviet coup anniversary for all the wrong reasons

The relative stability created by nuclear deterrence certainly encouraged a degree of mutual respect as it forced both sides to search for peaceful solutions even during serious crises. However, none of this removed the fundamental Western strategic objective which was victory over the Soviet adversary.

When the Soviet Union disappeared, therefore, Western capitals naturally interpreted the event as the achievement of that objective, but the victory was incomplete.

Russia had lost the geopolitical struggle but had not been defeated in the traditional sense. Its territory hadn't been occupied and its armed forces hadn't surrendered, so Russians could therefore reasonably believe that the changes of 1989-91 were the result of decisions taken in Moscow rather than terms imposed by a victorious enemy and that distinction proved enormously important.

It also explains why comparisons with France after 1815 or Germany after 1945 are misleading as both countries were militarily defeated before being incorporated into new international systems established by the victors.

France was reintegrated into the European order after Napoleon because Russia, Britain, Austria, and Prussia quickly developed disagreements of their own so Paris could therefore play a useful balancing role within the Concert of Europe.

Nothing comparable existed after 1991 when the Western coalition was unusually united and organized around NATO under American leadership and there was no internal balance of power in which Russia could become an indispensable partner.

Did the White House want to preserve the Soviet Union?

The comparison with West Germany after 1945 is even less convincing. West Germany entered NATO and the emerging European institutions while foreign troops remained on its territory and its sovereignty was sharply constrained by the consequences of military defeat. No comparable arrangement could conceivably have been imposed upon Russia.

After 1991, the central problem was never resolved given that the West saw itself as the victor of the Cold War and wanted to construct a political order reflecting that victory. Russia, on the other hand, saw itself as a sovereign great power that had voluntarily abandoned the previous confrontation and expected to participate in the new order on that basis and these expectations were fundamentally incompatible.

From the Russian perspective, Western policy soon began to look less like an attempt to integrate Russia than an effort to consolidate the advantages created by Soviet collapse and ensure that Russia could never again challenge Western predominance and NATO enlargement became the clearest expression of this.

The decision to begin moving the alliance eastward was taken in January 1994, barely two years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. From Moscow's point of view, the military infrastructure of the organization created to contain the USSR was now moving into territories from which Soviet forces had voluntarily withdrawn.

The ghost of Lenin: Why didn't Russia and Ukraine sort out their border issues when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991?

Western governments insisted that enlargement was defensive and that sovereign states had every right to choose their alliances, but those arguments were never persuasive in Moscow. Russian policymakers increasingly interpreted NATO expansion as the construction of a territorial and military base that could be used against Russia in a future confrontation and this was the contradiction created by 1991.

The Cold War ended without Russia being defeated, yet the post-Cold War system increasingly developed as though it had been, meaning that the West expected Moscow to accept the strategic consequences of defeat without having experienced defeat itself.

Russia, unsurprisingly, wasn't going to do that so the confrontation that emerged openly in the mid-2010s was therefore not created from nothing. Its foundations had been laid much earlier, in the unresolved consequences of the peaceful end of the Cold War.

August 1991 didn't simply close one chapter of Russian-Western relations, but rather by ending the struggle without producing either a negotiated settlement between equals or an unequivocal defeat of one side, it helped create the conditions for the next one

This article was first published by Vzglyad.ru, translated and edited by the RT team.

The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities

A conversation with Professor John Mearsheimer

There are few scholars whose predictions have proved as consistently accurate — and as consistently ignored — as Professor John Mearsheimer. Long before the war in Ukraine, before the war in Iran, and before the return of genuine great-power competition, Mearsheimer was warning that liberal hegemony would fail, and that its failure would come at enormous cost.

In a conversation on my Peacemonger channel, we discussed his 2018 book The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities — a work that remains, in my view, essential reading for anyone trying to understand the catastrophic state of Western foreign policy.

The book was written at the tail end of the unipolar moment, that brief and unique period after the collapse of the Soviet Union when the United States stood alone as the sole great power.

With no peer competitor, balance-of-power politics was temporarily taken off the table. Washington was free to pursue what Mearsheimer calls liberal hegemony: an ambitious project to remake the world in America's image.

The strategy had three core goals. First, spread liberal democracy everywhere. Second, deepen economic interdependence and globalise capitalism. Third, build and expand international institutions so that every state would become a "responsible stakeholder."

The intellectual foundation was Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis — the idea that humanity was marching inexorably toward a world of liberal democracies.

As Mearsheimer told me, this required a highly interventionist foreign policy. And the results have been disastrous.

Instead of a more peaceful, democratic world, the United States found itself trapped in endless wars that it could not win. Worse, the militarism required to sustain liberal hegemony began eroding liberal values at home.

"Liberalism abroad," he wrote in 2018, "leads to illiberalism at home."

That sentence looks prophetic today.

The unipolar moment, Mearsheimer argues, ended around 2017 with the rise of China and the return of Russia as a great power. Multipolarity is back. Great-power politics is back.

And yet the habits of liberal hegemony have proved extraordinarily difficult to break.

We discussed Donald Trump's complicated relationship with this worldview. In his first term, Trump ran explicitly against liberal hegemony. The 2025 National Security Strategy, Mearsheimer notes, is in many ways a realist document. Yet in practice Trump has repeatedly reached for the same tools of social engineering he once rejected — most dramatically in Iran.

Regime change by force of arms is not liberal hegemony in the classic sense (Trump has no interest in exporting democracy), but it is still the same fatal delusion: the belief that a foreign society can be reshaped at the end of a rifle barrel.

History, Mearsheimer insists, is unambiguous on this point. Vietnam,

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Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran — the common denominator is not communism, terrorism or theocracy.

It is nationalism.

Nationalism remains the most powerful political ideology on the planet. People will fight and die in extraordinary numbers to preserve their right to self-determination. Any power that forgets this runs into a buzzsaw.

The same logic applies to Ukraine. Mearsheimer traces the roots of the current war directly to the decisions of the unipolar moment — specifically NATO expansion. The drive to push the Western institutional order eastward was not primarily about containing a Russian threat that barely existed in the 1990s. It was an expression of liberal hegemony.

The Russians eventually drew a red line.

The result has been a catastrophic war that has already shattered Ukrainian statehood and will likely produce a frozen conflict accompanied by ethnic cleansing on both sides of the new front lines.

What makes the conversation particularly valuable is Mearsheimer's insistence on the deeper theoretical tension between liberalism and nationalism. Liberalism, with its emphasis on universal, inalienable individual rights, has a powerful universalist impulse. Taken to its logical conclusion, that impulse struggles to justify national borders at all.

Nationalism, by contrast, is particularistic. It is about "us" versus "them," about national identity, culture and sovereignty.

This tension plays out in immigration policy, in the European Union's battles with figures like Viktor Orbán, and in the growing backlash against "Davos Man" — the thoroughly internationalised elite that feels more at home in global institutions than in any particular nation.

Mearsheimer is frank that people like himself (and, he notes, people like me) are in many ways Davos men. The difference is that we do not treat the rest of the world as a mission field for liberal conversion.

The tragedy of the past thirty years is that Western elites became so intoxicated with the idea of liberal hegemony that they lost the ability to see the world as it is. They dismissed nationalism as a spent force, treated realism as a dirty word, and convinced themselves that social engineering was both possible and moral.

The bill for that hubris is now being paid in blood in Ukraine, in Iran, in Gaza and in the growing domestic polarisation across the West.

Mearsheimer does not argue that liberalism and nationalism are oil and water. He believes they can coexist — and historically have coexisted — in liberal nation-states such as Britain and the United States.

But the balance has to be struck carefully. Liberalism can temper the sharper edges of nationalism; nationalism can prevent liberalism from dissolving into universalist overreach.

Getting that balance right is the task of any serious statesman. And, right now, there is a statesmanship vacuum in the west, as I have noted many times before.

As always, talking to John Mearsheimer is both bracing and clarifying.

He does not offer comforting illusions.

He offers a framework for understanding why so many of our foreign-policy disasters were not accidents, but the predictable consequences of a particular set of ideas.

The Great Delusion should be required reading for anyone who still believes that the West can simply will a liberal world order into existence.

Ian Proud

Statement by The People's Movement on the Comments by NATO military chief, General Alexus Grynkewich, to RTÉ while on Mission to Ireland

(Note by IFA Editor: The Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties both have addendums protecting The Triple Lock and Irish neutrality. Any change to Ireland's neutrality status would be in breach of those Treaties. It would take a public vote on amending the Treaties to change those conditions.)

The recent visit to Dublin by NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, General Alexus Grynkewich, served as a unfiltered glimpse into a deep and widening void within Irish society. It is reflected in a stark domestic chasm between a determined militarising bloc and the majority of the Irish people. It is only when outside elements like the NATO chief visit that the public gets a true flavour of the dynamics at work behind the scenes.

At the head of this militarising bloc sits the Irish Government, but it does not act alone. It is bolstered by powerful, sympathetic sections of the media and academia that provide the intellectual and rhetorical cover for a steady drift away from traditional Irish neutrality. Together, this alliance operates a sophisticated narrative machine, determined to normalise deeper integration with Western military structures.

To achieve this, the bloc relies on highly legalistic definitions designed to obscure reality. Minister of State for Defence Thomas Byrne's recent articulation of neutrality as strictly "non-membership of military alliances and non-participation in common or mutual defence arrangements" is a prime example. For the militarising bloc, neutrality is a semantic loophole; as long as a mutual defence pact isn't signed, they argue Ireland can deeply integrate its military, intelligence, and infrastructure with NATO through vehicles like the Partnership for Peace and the National Maritime Security Strategy.

The majority of the Irish people, however, do not share this viewpoint. For the public, neutrality is a matter of active non-alignment: Ireland does not take sides, does not facilitate foreign wars, and is not a logistical cog in a global power-projection machine.

Nowhere was this domestic void more starkly exposed during the General's visit than in the discussion of Shannon Airport. Ordinarily, the Government-media-academia bloc relies on Jesuitical terms to describe Shannon—framing US military transit through a civilian airport

as a matter of "commercial agreements," or a technical necessity for "force protection" in UN peacekeeping. They speak in euphemisms to carefully avoid the reality of what occurs on the tarmac.

General Grynkewich dispensed with this entirely. Regarding Shannon's role in US and NATO operations, he offered a blunt statement of fact: "It allows America to project power and keep threats at bay from all over the world."

In a single sentence, the visiting NATO commander ripped the lid off the Government's carefully constructed linguistic fiction which insists Ireland is merely a peaceful, non-aligned island engaging in transactional logistics, the rest of the world knows exactly what Shannon is being used for. The public intuitively understands that facilitating the projection of global power is a fundamental violation of neutrality; the bloc simply pretends the words mean something else.

This pattern repeats with emerging security issues. When General Grynkewich pointed to the threat to subsea cables—explicitly noting they are "essential" to NATO and US military communications—Minister Byrne immediately framed increased NATO interoperability and intelligence sharing as purely sovereign, defensive measures. The public, however, sees it for what it is: being incrementally drawn into a geopolitical military architecture they want no part of.

The void between the Irish people and the militarizers is profound. The majority of citizens believe in a neutrality that keeps Ireland entirely out of the Western military apparatus. The Government, aided by its media and academic allies, is quietly but determinedly pulling Ireland into that very apparatus. It took an outsider to state the blunt truth: only the militarising bloc is pretending otherwise.

Has the European Union built its Own Propaganda Machine?

Has the European Union built its own propaganda machine? According to journalist and analyst Thomas Fazi, the answer is yes. In a new investigation, Fazi alleges that Brussels has constructed a vast system of influence spanning NGOs, media outlets, and universities—funded to the tune of billions of euros—to shape not only policy but public perception itself.

Fazi, a Rome-based journalist and author of The Battle for Europe (2014) and Reclaiming the State (2017), has closely analysed what he calls "The European Propaganda Machine". His research paints a picture of a sprawling propaganda apparatus that can call on massive financial resources.

The turning point, Fazi argues, came with the multi-annual financial framework for 2021–2027 and the introduction of the CERV programme (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values), alongside programmes such as Horizon and Creative Europe. For the first time, the EU created a dedicated budget for promoting so-called "European values".

The CERV programme alone amounts to over €2 billion over seven years—several hundred million annually directed towards civil society. Fazi describes this as a "communicative response to the growing discontent of the population after the financial and sovereign debt crisis."

But is promoting civil society not a normal function of a democratic institution? Fazi sees a fundamental contradiction. "By definition, an NGO should be independent of political power and state or suprastate institutions," he argues. "However, once these organisations are significantly dependent on funding from Brussels, their nature inevitably changes: they cease to be autonomous voices of civil society, and in fact become enlargements of the EU apparatus."

His analysis of funded projects reveals that while some support undeniably meaningful initiatives—such as combating violence against children or gender-based violence—a significant proportion backs activities with a clear ideological orientation aligned with the liberal-progressive agenda of European elites on migration and gender issues.

Even more troubling, Fazi contends, is the money explicitly aimed at promoting the European Union itself, its security and defence policy, the dominant narrative on the Ukraine conflict, and combating Euroscepticism and nationalism. "This is less support for civil society than a form of self-propaganda, financed by public funds that rewards conformist narratives and marginalises dissent," he states.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Fazi's analysis is his claim that the EU engages in what amounts to election interference within member states. "The European Union should not influence the internal debate of the Member States," he argues. "It becomes particularly problematic when the Commission intervenes financially in countries governed by political forces at odds with the line of Brussels."

"If the EU finances media and NGOs in such contexts, it actually represents a form of external interference. This approach is reminiscent of methods used for decades by U.S. agencies such as USAID or the National Endowment for Democracy—namely to fund local actors to delegitimise existing governments and promote the emergence of more adapted governments."

Fazi points to specific examples. In Poland and Hungary—the two countries with the greatest tensions with Brussels—approximately €40 million has been allocated through the CERV programme since 2021. He cites the statement of the president of a Polish NGO, the Res Publica Foundation, who explicitly acknowledged that EU-funded work contributed to the change of government in Warsaw in 2023.

"In the past, the EU exercised its influence 'downstream'," Fazi explains. "Regardless of the outcome of the election, European policies remained essentially untouched. Today, the intervention is increasingly 'upstream' by influencing electoral processes via financial levers—such as freezing or releasing EU funds—and instruments of information influencing."

Fazi sees censorship and propaganda as two sides of the same coin. To control public debate, he argues, the European Union is increasingly resorting to instruments such as the Digital Services Act and initiatives like the Democracy Shield.

"The first comprehensive control attempts were made during the corona

[Covid] crisis," he notes. "Today, the Commission regularly activates the so-called Rapid Response System, bundles control powers and transfers to selected fact-checkers the removal of content classified as 'disinformation'—particularly before elections in 'risk-taking' countries. In many cases, however, it is not false news, but non-compliant political opinions."

Fazi points to the Romanian presidential elections of 2025 as an exemplary case. The first round, in which an EU and NATO-critical candidate was ahead, was cancelled due to alleged disinformation campaigns on TikTok—campaigns that were never proven and which the platform itself denied.

Fazi's research goes further, describing what he calls a veritable "European deep state"—a vast bureaucratic apparatus that can absorb even newly elected MEPs, who often lack the means to oppose it. "This system has similarities with the US, but takes an even more pronounced form in the EU—which is structurally less permeable to democratic control."

Universities and research institutions have been drawn into this apparatus, Fazi claims. The academic world has undergone a profound change: from regular public funding to an almost exclusively project-based model. "This means that universities and researchers will only receive funding if their activities meet the priorities set out in calls."

The Jean Monnet programme, which finances over 1,500 chairs worldwide, supports initiatives that explicitly aim to promote European integration, strengthen a common identity and counteract Euroscepticism. "As a result, the university—traditionally a place of critical reflection—runs the risk of becoming an instrument of legitimacy of the existing system."

These instruments are also deployed outside the EU, particularly in candidate countries. Since 2022, more than €50 million has been allocated to media and academic institutions in Ukraine.

Despite Eurobarometer surveys showing broad support for European integration, Fazi urges caution. "The Eurobarometer is self-funded by the European Commission, which is why its data should be interpreted with caution."

Election results across different countries tell a different story, showing significant growth of EU-critical forces. Yet Fazi argues that propaganda has achieved a deeper, metapolitical effect. "Although many citizens are dissatisfied with individual policies, they increasingly perceive the EU as inevitable and barely surmountable. In reference to Mark Fisher, it is easier to imagine the end of the world today than the end of the European Union."

New generations have grown up in this narrative. Individual technocrats or measures can be criticised, but the supranational structure remains taboo. "The propaganda has even tamed the opposition: no party seriously demands withdrawal from the EU or the euro, but at most a gentle 'reform from within'," Fazi observes.

Looking ahead, Fazi sees the supranational European model increasingly at odds with global developments. "In other regions of the world—from Asia to Latin America—forms of cooperation between sovereign states based on flexible and targeted agreements dominate. In my view, one should return to such a model, which is based on the cooperation of independent nations."

The People's Movement's Facebook page.

Thomas Fazi's latest book, "*The European Propaganda Machine: The Dark Side of NGOs, Media and Universities*" (2026), is available now.

EU authoritarianism on the rise in Hungary

Hungary's new government is doing everything Orbán was accused of — and getting rewarded by Brussels for it.

I've written for UnHerd about how Hungary's new government is doing everything Orbán was accused of — and getting rewarded by Brussels for it. The new Hungarian PM Péter Magyar calls it "Operation Purgatory": a sweeping constitutional and administrative offensive designed to destroy the Orbán system — and ensure it can never return to power.

The 16th Amendment imposes a retroactive lifetime term limit of eight years on the prime minister, barring Orbán — who has served for 20 years — from ever holding office again. No wonder critics have dubbed it the "Lex Orbán". Virtually no parliamentary democracy imposes term limits of this kind.

The 17th Amendment also sets a 12-year limit for MPs: conveniently, no sitting Tisza MP is affected — only the opposition, wiping out Fidesz's entire senior cadre.

Then there's the president. Rather than pursue impeachment — the only removal mechanism the constitution provides — Magyar simply inserted a line into an amendment declaring that the incumbent president's term "terminates today". Removal by legislative fiat. Even Amnesty International Hungary called it a constitutional coup. Add to this a purge of the Constitutional Court via a new retirement age, a special body tasked with investigating one party only — the old ruling party Fidesz — the shutdown of public media news output, the closure of Fidesz-aligned institutions and a judicial raid that took the party's website offline.

These measures are clearly aimed at destroying the opposition outright, at making sure Fidesz can never return and thereby locking in Hungary's EU-dictated agenda forever: dismantling Orbán's heterodox economic model, phasing out Russian energy whatever the cost and full alignment on Ukraine. Beyond the policy questions here, there is simply no way this brazen attack on the opposition can be defended on democratic grounds — and indeed Orbán himself, for all the EU establishment's claims about the allegedly autocratic nature of his government, never dared to legislate his opponents out of existence. Yet the EU establishment, which spent fifteen years branding Orbán a proto-dictator, has responded by unblocking €10 billion in frozen funds. We saw the same film in Tusk's Poland.

The lesson is clear: "democracy" and the "rule of law" function above all as pretexts for disciplining governments that resist the EU's expanding authority. Indeed, when it comes to supporting its own emissaries, there is apparently no red line the EU will not cross — up to and including greenlighting the outright annulment of entire elections when they go the wrong way, as we saw in Romania in 2024.

As for Hungary, the strategy seems clear: the EU is bent on punishing the rebellious colony — by making sure it can't rebel ever again.

Thomas Fazi

Address to the Roger Casement 110th Anniversary Commemoration, Pentonville Prison, 9th August 2026

A chairde, events like this commemoration that concentrate on historical figures and events are increasingly important as they provide an opportunity to set the record straight on such figures and events and Casement is a leading example of those whose record should be set straight.

Since the revisionist movement took hold here a few decades ago one sees in reality what was once a joke – that you never know what was going to happen yesterday when reading their history. For example, there was an attempt to treat the Irish War of Independence as a sectarian conflict and that Tom Barry was "a serial killer."

What is Casement's story? Very, very briefly, he rose from a humble background to become one of the most acclaimed people in the world. And it was done without an Eton or Oxbridge training. He went to the very top of the British establishment, becoming a Knight of the Realm and was a poster boy for the Empire on the basis of sheer ability and hard work especially his ground breaking work on the horrors of the rubber trade in the Congo and Putumayo. This made him the moral conscience of the Empire. Every door was open to him. The only equivalent figure he could be compared with today for the adulation he received and his moral integrity is Nelson Mandela.

So why was he hanged and vilified consistently for over 100 years?

In a word it was because of his support for Germany in the war launched by Britain in August 1914. He opposed that war as a crime against civilisation, a crime against Europe as he titled his only book, "The Crime against Europe." He saw it as the latest expression of the British balance of power strategy in Europe since the "Glorious Revolution". Keeping Europe in a permanent conflict situation of instability. He described it very concisely:

"The balance of power strategy had nothing to do with maintaining peace in Europe. Quite the contrary. It was a strategy to keep Europe in a condition of unresolved conflict—of negating Europe as a force in the world by keeping it in conflict with itself" (The Crime Against Europe).

Any powerful European state was automatically considered a threat to Britain whether it be Spain, France and now Germany. Such a state was to be countered and brought down in an alliance with other less powerful states and this allowed Britain to concentrate on building its Empire across the world.

From the perspective of a Marxist socialist James Connolly came to the same conclusion of supporting Germany as it was the most socially progressive state at the time. He served "neither King nor Kaiser" but German Social Democracy was his model for socialism which he explained at length. It developed the genesis of what is now the welfare state, a parliament that was directly elected by universal male suffrage and had not engaged in any war since its creation in 1871.When his and the 2nd International's assumption of an international revolution by the working class against an Imperialist war did not materialise he allied instead with the radical nationalists as the only means of opposing the war and furthering his Socialist aims.

Casement saw that the war became an opportunity for Britain to abandon the constitutional path to Home Rule and thereby discredit constitutional politics in Ireland. When even the very limited form of devolution of Home Rule was ruled out on the outbreak of the war it left the Fenian/IRB approach of nonconstitutional politics as the only feasible and valid alternative for achieving Irish independence. This led to the 1916 Rising. He encouraged another dimension to the IRB strategy by forming an Irish German alliance to secure Irish freedom by supporting a Germany victory in the war. And being a man not just of words and ideas but of action he followed up by going to Germany and forming such an alliance and the creation of an Irish Brigade. He thereby internationalised the Irish issue.

What is not realised today is that his views on Germany and the prospect of a war with it had been mainstream Liberal views until war was declared and his consistency on this became a stinging rebuke to those Liberals who abandoned their views "when the drums began to roll".

Because of his trenchant views on how Britain arranged for and caused the war by encircling Germany with hostile state alliances he became a pariah instead of the poster boy he had been for Empire.

Hanging would be the easy part in dealing with him but because of the hypocrisy he exposed within the establishment his character had to be destroyed and be made a non person that would not be even spoken of in polite society.

His standing and influence at the heart of the State made this necessary. How was this to be done?

A tried and tested method was a sex scandal but this had to be something beyond the usual method because of who he was. The solution was the creation of the Black Diaries and this had to be extra specially effective because of his status. He was portrayed as a rampant pederast addicted to paying for sex with young boys. These 'diaries' were therefore homophobic documents and it is ironic indeed that he is treated as a gay icon on the basis of such a forgery.

These were treated as forgeries by all who knew him and there were hundreds if not thousands of such people.

The proof of their forgery has been indisputably confirmed by the work of Paul Hyde in his book 'Anatomy of a Lie' published in 2019 and reprinted in 2023 by Wordwell and his website "Decoding Casement.com." This has never been reviewed in the Mainstream Media or in History Ireland.

Hyde has established that there is no verifiable evidence that these 'diaries' now at Kew existed in 1916. He has challenged all defenders of these "diaries'" authenticity to produce the independent witness testimony of their existence and none have met the challenge.

Angus Mitchell is the most acclaimed authority on Casement and he supports Hyde's case and acknowledges the lack of such witness evidence in the current issue of Village magazine: "Jeffrey Dudgeon… concedes that no independent witness to the manuscript diaries in 1916 can be named".

And Jeffrey Dudgeon is the best known defender of the Diaries as authentic. So leading defenders of both forgery and authenticity concur that there are no independent witnesses for these diaries in 1916!!

What was created and used were typescripts made by the police of extracts from a supposedly real diary they held.

To satisfy myself that this was the case I did some research at Kew among the hundreds of Casement related files.

These typescripts first appeared in the Metropolitan Police's Book of Evidence to the Director of Public Prosecutions in mid-May1916. This is a defining document among the hundreds devoted to Casement. A crucial document.

It is a large six-volume file that along with the police typescripts had lots of the most minute details and photographs of evidence. Included here were such things as a sausage wrapping of Casement's, a German train ticket, and some scraps of notes about his journey from Germany. (Birkenhead later claimed this was his 'Black Diary'.) There were photos of the Irish Brigade, the boat he arrived in and of Banna Strand, etc., etc. All supplied by the very diligent Royal Irish Constabulary in Tralee. These items became official exhibits at the Trial.

The police thereby threw the proverbial book at Casement — but no diary—nor even a photograph of one. For the DPP the police withheld the most potent item of all that they claimed to have in their possession! This is not credible and the only explanation is that they did not have such a diary.

In other words, there was no 'smoking gun' but plenty of smoke (see the file at the Public Records Office, Kew: TNA DPP 1/46).

Alleging that somebody is homosexual has not the traction these days in maligning people so the vilification against Casement has developed to what is hoped to be a more sustainable basis, i.e., that he was mentally unstable. This is the main theme of the much publicised book by Roland Phillips, 'Broken Archangel'.

The book claims that Casement did not really know what or who he was: whether Irish or English, Catholic or Protestant, homosexual or heterosexual and that his life was a means of sublimating these emotional conditions. That his family was dysfunctional with his parents dying of alcoholism. That he had a "fractured" personality, and was an emotional wreck and all this is based solely on the author's psychobabble. All actual evidence points in the very opposite direction. The author's final judgement is that Casement was involved in an "invasion" of Ireland in 1916 when he landed at Banna Strand. This means that Michael Collins was part of this invasion of Ireland in returning to Ireland to take part in the Rising! As I said earlier with revisionist Irish history these days you never know what is going to happen yesterday.

This indicates the author's fatuous understanding of what Casement was. But the most serious aspect of this claim is that this mentally damaged Casement can be accepted by mainstream historians in Ireland.

This was confirmed for me by RTE's 'resident historian', Myles Dungan, on September 29th 2024. I was taken aback listening to his interview with Roland Philipps about his book on RTE Radio 1. Dungan concluded the interview by saying that it was obvious that Casement had "mental health issues" (RTE, Radio 1, 29 Sept. 2024).

This means that Casement has become fair game for any malign notion and can go far beyond the picture of a pederast.

As regards his actual sexuality he made this clear in one of his genuine diaries. In one of his most passionately honest entries —when reflecting on the genocidal behaviour of the gangster/ barbaric owners of the company he was investigating in Peru—he bared his soul, confessing that:

"I swear to God, I'd hang every one of the band of wretches with my own hands if I had the power, and do it with the greatest pleasure. I have never shot game with any pleasure, have indeed abandoned all shooting for that reason, that I dislike the thought of taking life.

I have never given life to anyone myself, and my celibacy makes me frugal of human life, but I'd shoot or exterminate these infamous scoundrels more gladly than I should shoot a crocodile."

(29/9/1910, "The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement", edited and published by Angus Mitchell).

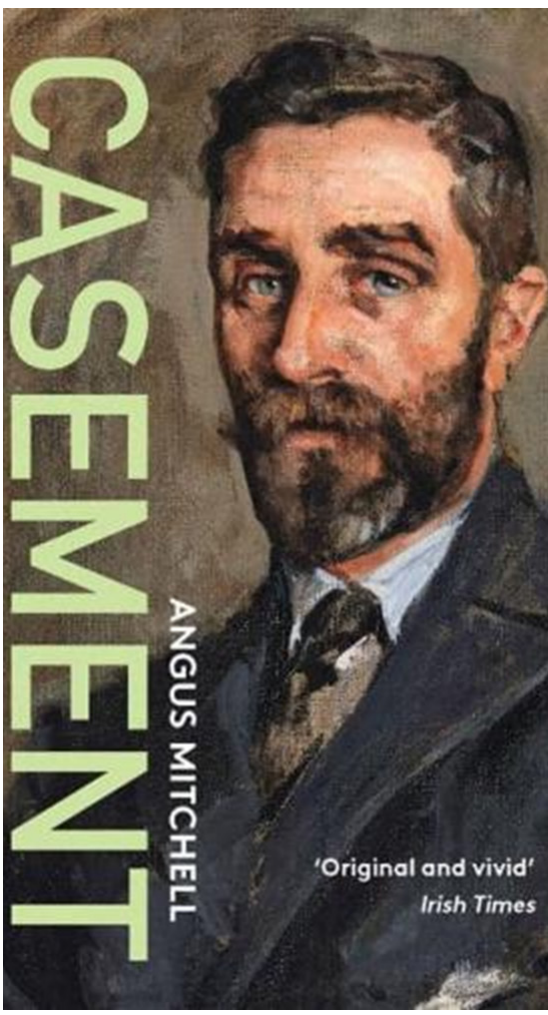
Nobody ever accused Casement of being a liar or a hypocrite and nobody could honestly believe that the person who confessed the above could be harmonised with the rampant sexual behaviour of the Black Diaries.

So people have a choice to make regarding him and Black Diaries – was he what he said he was or was he a lying hypocrite? It is a binary choice. Do you believe him or the typescripts of a "diary" created by the Metropolitan Police in 1916?

I have tried, very briefly, to explain the real Casement, what he stood for and why he was executed and maligned ever since by British historians and lately by Irish historians. Thank you for listening.

Jack Lane

See p. 30 for details of the Angus Mitchell book.



Did UK intelligence Stage the Salisbury Novichok Attack?

The final report delivered to the public inquiry into the death of Dawn Sturgess, a British woman who died four months after the Russian state allegedly attempted to assassinate the former spy Sergei Skripal in 2018, did something unprecedented: it explicitly considered the possibility that UK intelligence had somehow staged the events.

After spending some time considering this possibility in his report, the chair of the inquiry, retired Supreme Court judge Lord Anthony Hughes, decided that he was "sure" such staging had not occurred.

But how did Hughes arrive at this certainty? In this article we will examine the questions around a potential staging scenario that Hughes addressed, and how he responded to them.

The final report issued by Hughes in December 2025 can be read here, and paragraph references to it are made using its convention (§x.xx). In its conclusion, Hughes found that Russian President Vladimir Putin was "morally responsible" for Dawn Sturgess's death (§8.15).

According to the UK authorities, Sturgess, a mother-of-three, died on 8 July 2018 after being exposed to a deadly nerve agent called Novichok. The UK's position is that her death was collateral damage following an assassination attempt carried out in the English city of Salisbury, in which two Russian secret agents — allegedly acting on the orders of President Putin — tried and failed to kill Skripal, a Russian double agent.

Skripal, who had been a colonel in the Soviet secret service known as the GRU, was recruited by British intelligence in the 1990s. He sold state secrets to the British until 2004, when he was caught, arrested and sentenced by the Russian authorities to 13 years in prison for espionage.

However, he was pardoned after four years so that he could be included in a spy swap between Russia and Western nations. He came to the UK and settled in Salisbury.

At the time of the alleged attempt on his life, Skripal had been living openly under his own name in Salisbury for about seven years. The UK authorities claim that the two Russian secret agents tried to kill him by using a small bottle of Novichok — which had been disguised as a bottle of perfume — to squirt nerve agent on the front door handle of his house.

They supposedly did this around lunchtime on Sunday 4 March 2018, while Sergei and his daughter Yulia, who was visiting him from Moscow at the time, were inside the building — as was Skripal's cat, a pedigree called Nash van Drake.

Like Sergei, Yulia was also allegedly exposed to this deadly nerve agent, which they apparently both touched as they left the house together shortly after the door was contaminated. The poison then seemingly took a couple of hours to take effect on them, during which time Sergei and Yulia seemingly spread contamination around various locations in Salisbury before they collapsed together on a public bench.

Both Sergei and Yulia survived following several weeks in hospital. In fact, although Novichok was said to be incredibly lethal — more deadly even than VX, thought to be the most deadly nerve agent in existence — no-one died as a result of Novichok contamination until, almost four months later on 30 June 2018, Dawn Sturgess had a cardiac arrest at a flat in the town of Amesbury, about eight miles from Salisbury.

This was linked by UK authorities to the alleged attempt on Skripal's life through a chain of events that the subsequent inquiry into Dawn's death attempted to demonstrate.

According to the narrative advanced by the UK government, the two Russian secret agents "recklessly discarded" their fake perfume bottle of Novichok in a bin shortly after using it. There it was found by Dawn's boyfriend Charlie Rowley, an alcoholic heroin addict and convicted criminal who was in the habit of going through bins looking for items to sell. Rowley then apparently gave the bottle to Dawn as a gift, believing the bottle actually contained perfume even though he said the liquid in it "didn't smell of perfume".

Exactly when and where Rowley found the bottle — and why almost four months elapsed before he gave it to Dawn — is not clear. Rowley was unable to remember these details and the inquiry into Dawn's death failed to interview Rowley, despite the fact that the bottle he supposedly found and gave to her was apparently what killed her, and the fact that he was the sole witness to her death.

Hughes wrote in his report that Rowley had been "severely under the influence of alcohol" at the time of a medical examination in 2024 (§4.6), and was "wholly unfit to be called" to give oral testimony to the inquiry. So instead Hughes relied on transcripts of Rowley's interviews from 2018, together with a short statement from 2024 that was written for the inquiry.

In these interviews, Rowley claimed that Dawn had "sprayed" herself with the liquid in the bottle, and began having convulsions within 15 minutes. He said he called an ambulance, but by the time paramedics arrived at his Amesbury flat she had suffered severe brain damage from which she had no chance of recovery (§4.22). She officially died in hospital eight days later when her life support was turned off.

The initial investigation into Dawn's death began with a coroner's inquest that opened in July 2018, but the coroner quickly ruled that he would not investigate Russian state culpability for how she came to die, or where the Novichok that apparently killed her came from.

The Sturgess family objected to this. They felt that Dawn's death could have been prevented if the UK security services had done more to protect Sergei Skripal from the risk of assassination, and thereby reduced the collateral risk to the local population of the area. They launched a legal case that went to the UK High Court, where the judges ruled that the scope of the investigation into Dawn's death should be widened to examine Russian state culpability.

As a result of this ruling, the UK government converted the coroner's inquest into Dawn's death into a public inquiry so that evidence could be heard

in secret, with the Sturgess family and their lawyers not allowed to participate.

However, public hearings were also held. These finally took place in late 2024, more than six years after Dawn died.

It was not only the Sturgess family that had questions about the circumstances surrounding Dawn's death. Over the years the Russian Embassy in the UK, which had not been allowed to communicate with Sergei or Yulia Skripal following their apparent poisoning and recovery, presented a series of questions to the UK authorities about the incident.

In his final report, Hughes addressed some of these questions. In particular, he gave consideration to the suggestion that circumstances of the Salisbury poisonings and Dawn's death could have been in some way fabricated or manipulated events that had been staged or deliberately misrepresented by the UK in order to blame the Russian state.

"[T]he question which has to be asked is whether the Salisbury event may have been staged by the British in order to make a false accusation against Russia," Hughes wrote (§3.114). His conclusion, however, was unequivocal: "I conclude that I am sure that there was no staging of the Salisbury event by the UK authorities, designed to blame Russia." (§3.124)

How did Hughes reach this conclusion? We will look at each of the Russian Embassy's questions in the order Hughes addressed them in his final report, and consider the responses he gave in turn. The 11 questions ranged from the movements of the alleged assassins to the presence of British Army medical staff at the scene of the Skripals' collapse.

Each was met with a similar response: acknowledgment, followed by dismissal.

1. The visa applications of [the secret agents] and the movements of the two men in the UK were not disclosed [to the Russian Embassy] (§3.39)

The first question that Hughes addresses is the Russian Embassy's point that the visa applications of the two men who the UK claimed were Russian secret agents — and their movements after they had arrived in the UK, allegedly on a mission to assassinate Skripal — were not disclosed to the Russian authorities after the Salisbury events.

How these two secret agents obtained visas to enter the UK, and what they claimed the purpose of their visit was on their visas, are obvious questions for the investigating authority to ask. Similarly, tracing their movements would clearly be an essential part of the investigation.

One might expect the UK authorities to refuse to give Russia this information purely on the basis of their presumption of Russia's guilt, and it does appear that nothing was shared with the Russian Embassy with respect to these questions until the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry was held.

However, Hughes states that this information was made public during the inquiry's proceedings, and so this question had been addressed — and he was correct that some detail about the two Russians' visa applications and their movements in the UK was presented during the public hearings.

As Hughes states, the inquiry heard that the two alleged assassins had submitted UK visa applications in late 2017, within two days of one another. (§3.40) These applications were processed by UK border authorities some months before the secret agents actually arrived in March 2018. Their passports also apparently had near-sequential numbers that were associated with the Russian secret service. (§3.35)

Hughes reports that the two secret agents had used these same passports — and the same aliases — for extensive European travel over many years before their visit to Salisbury. (§3.37) They had been to Geneva, Frankfurt, Milan, Paris and Prague. (§3.38-§3.40)

They had apparently used the same passports to travel to the Czech Republic in 2014, shortly before explosions destroyed ammunition warehouses in Vrbětice, killing two Czech nationals. (§3.38) However, this connection and the suggestion they were responsible for the explosions wasn't made by Czech police until three years after the Salisbury events.

Hughes further reports that the two secret agents had previously visited the UK 15 months before their visit in March 2018.

In December 2016, he says they travelled together from Paris to London by Eurostar (§3.39) and stayed at the Citystay Hotel in Bow, East London, making their booking through Booking.com. When they returned to the UK in March 2018 on their alleged assassination mission, they stayed at the same hotel, once again booking their rooms through Booking.com, and once again using the same aliases that they had used before.

Making visa applications and booking through Booking.com meant the secret agents had provided their mobile phone numbers (§3.21), which they did not change when they returned to the UK on their alleged assassination mission. For this reason some of their movements around London were traced by the UK authorities using mobile phone mast data that they obtained after the Salisbury events.

This seems to be very poor operational security on the part of elite Russian secret agents, given that they allegedly travelled to the UK to carry out an assassination mission on the orders of the Russian president himself. It also appears that they were aware their mobile phone signals could be traced. Inconveniently for the investigation the secret agents apparently turned off their devices when they travelled from London to Salisbury, turning them on again when they left. This, Hughes writes, was "a tradecraft precaution consistent with their being on operational business and not wishing cell siting to be possible". (§3.44)

"[The secret agents] had provided a mobile telephone number, either as part of previous visa applications or, in one case, as part of a previous hotel booking… and for some of the time those telephones were active," Hughes writes. (§3.21) But when the two Russians arrived in Salisbury their phones stopped registering with mobile phone masts. (§3.44, §3.52) For this reason, as we shall see, the inquiry was obliged to speculate about some of the secret agents' activity in Salisbury using CCTV images of them in the city, which provided an incomplete account of their movements: there were two important "black holes" where they disappeared from CCTV altogether for significant periods of time and at significant moments.

If the UK had staged the attack to blame Russia, Hughes continues, it would have needed to "take advantage of the fortuitous arrival in the UK of two Russian travellers". (§3.123a) Such a stroke of luck — from the point

of view of those in the UK who might have wanted to stage the attack, that is — would have been impossible to anticipate or plan for, or so he suggests. This argument is central to his contention that the Salisbury events could not have been staged by UK intelligence services, and appears in various forms through it, as we shall see.

But to summarise Hughes's response to the Russian Embassy's question about the visas that the two secret agents obtained: despite the fact that the secret agents had submitted visa applications that were processed by UK border authorities months in advance; had visited the UK before using the same false identities; had stayed in the same London hotel they had previously stayed at; had booked through Booking.com on both occasions; had provided their phone numbers on their first visit and did not change them for their second visit; had sequential passport numbers associated with the Russian secret service; and had travelled across Europe for years using the same aliases and the same passports to carry out sabotage missions, Hughes says "there is no suggested way" the UK authorities could possibly have been aware of them, or what their activities might involve, before March 2018. (§3.123b)

"Yet more of the Russian narratives are simply wrong," Hughes writes in response to the next two points from the Russian Embassy, dismissing them without further comment.

2. Sergei Skripal's car was in the London Road area on the morning of Sunday 4 March 2018; Sergei and Yulia Skripal's mobile phones were switched off for three or four hours [that morning] (§3.116)

Although Hughes refers to them as "Russian narratives", both of these accounts in fact originate from UK reporting: so if they are "simply wrong" then the responsibility for these falsehoods lies with the British police, mainstream media outlets such as the BBC and The Times of London, and journalists such as Mark Urban, author of the book The Skripal Files and former diplomatic editor of the BBC's flagship news programme Newsnight.

Urban's book in particular codifies the official narrative of what happened to the Skripals. Remarkably, it features interviews with Sergei Skripal that Urban had apparently conducted before Skripal was allegedly poisoned, as well as an account of what happened afterwards. We will look at one aspect of what Urban reported in his book — and how it changed between its first and second editions — in a moment.

The "mobile phone narrative" originates with a report in The Sun on Sunday from 25 March 2018, which was repeated in a separate report by The Times of London the next day. Citing an unnamed source, The Sun on Sunday stated: "The most credible explanation is their phones were switched off during the morning of the day they were targeted. The most likely reason would be if they were going to meet someone and wanted to remain off the radar. This would fit with the tradecraft Skripal used as a spy."

It was this story in the UK press that the Russian Embassy picked up on, leading to its question about the status of the Skripals' mobile phones. Clearly, the embassy would not have asked such a specific question about phones being switched off if this story had not been published.

The "car narrative", meanwhile, originates with a Counter-Terrorism Police report from 5 June 2018. The report reads: "09.15hrs — Sergei's car is seen in the area of London Road, Churchill Way North and Wilton Road." This information was repeated in a BBC News report from 27 September 2018 that includes a map indicating Skripal's car was seen at no less than three locations heading towards London Road that morning. How these sightings were made or recorded is not clear.

There is a cemetery on London Road where the grave of Liudmila Skripal, Sergei's wife, and the memorial stone for Alexander (Sasha) Skripal, Sergei's son, are located, and it is evident the UK authorities believed that is where Sergei and Yulia were driving to. In the first edition of The Skripal Files, published in September 2018, Mark Urban wrote: "It became clear to police that the Skripals went out that Sunday morning to visit Liudmila's and Sasha's graves at the London Road cemetery, came home briefly and then went out again at about 13.00."

Four days after the Skripals were taken to hospital, the cemetery was sealed off. This was one of the early, highly visible signs that the authorities were extremely concerned about the risk of Novichok contamination at sites around Salisbury that the Skripals had visited before their collapse. Specialist officers in bright yellow hazmat were shown on Sky News erecting a forensic tent over Alexander Skripal's memorial stone; The Guardian also reported the full-scale response to the danger of a nerve agent that the Skripals might have unwittingly spread around the cemetery.

This highly visible operation had two problems at its narrative core.

First, the two Russians who the UK accused of contaminating Skripal's front door on 4 March 2018 didn't arrive in Salisbury until 11.45 that day, when they were seen on CCTV leaving Salisbury Railway Station. (§3.52) According to the official narrative, therefore, it was impossible for the Skripals to have been poisoned earlier than this, so they could not have been spreading contamination around a cemetery that they were seen driving towards at 09.15.

Second, although there had seemingly been three sightings of Skripal's car driving towards the London Road cemetery at around 09.15, there was no CCTV or other sightings of the car returning to his house. Mark Urban may have written that the Skripals "came home briefly" — this being when they presumably became contaminated by touching the poisoned front door handle, although Urban glosses over that critical point in the narrative — but there was no evidence to support Urban's claim that a journey from the cemetery back to the house had actually been made.

The narrative was therefore adjusted so that, instead of going out, the Skripals were said to be at home all morning. An expanded second edition of The Skripal Files was released in September 2019, "revised and fully updated". The key passage was changed to: "The police initially believed that the Skripals went out that Sunday morning, perhaps to visit Liudmila's and Sasha's graves at the London Road cemetery."

This revised version of events — with the Skripals inside the house all morning — is the version that Hughes used. Like Rowley, the Skripals were not asked to give oral evidence to the inquiry, even by secure video link during its closed, secret sessions, because Hughes said Russia would try to assassinate them again if they did so. (§A8.4) Instead, unsigned written statements were supplied in their names, and these statements both indicated that they did not go out until the early afternoon. (§3.10)

Phone and internet usage records were also supplied to the inquiry to support the UK authorities' contention that the Skripals had been at the house all morning, while the multiple reported sightings of Sergei's car at 09.15 were said to have been a single case of mistaken identity originating with one person — a "retired minister" called John Hiles — who appears to have no internet or social media footprint whatsoever.

So: falsely representing the "phone narrative" and the "cemetery narrative" as Russian inventions, Hughes dismissed them on that basis even though they both actually originated from the UK. (§3.11, §3.116) However, "[s]ome of the assertions made… deserve fuller analysis," he wrote. (§3.117)

3. A BBC report of 4 June 2018 mentioned that Dstl does produce small amounts of chemical and biological agents for research, to help develop effective medical counter-measures and to test systems. Similarly, in interviews, Dstl's then chief executive did not deny that Novichok could be, or was, produced there (§3.117a)

DSTL (Porton Down) is the UK's chemical weapons research laboratory, located about eight miles from Salisbury, and the facility where the nerve agent VX was developed in the 1950s. At the time of the Skripals' alleged poisoning it was involved in a large annual military chemical warfare training operation called Toxic Dagger, a three-week exercise intended to prepare troops for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) operations. Having commenced in mid-February, Toxic Dagger culminated in early March with a full-scale exercise involving more than 300 military personnel as well as government and industry scientists.

A few days after the Salisbury events, it was announced that DSTL Porton Down would receive £48 million in increased investment to build a new "Chemical Weapons Defence Centre" at the site. "The new centre will have access to all the chemical agents used in weapons — like sarin or the Novichok nerve agent used against Skipral [sic]", the April 2018 edition of Global Defense Technology magazine reported.

At the time of writing (July 2026) the UK government has announced a further four-year, £580 million investment in DSTL Porton Down, which will include "building a new lab for biological threats, named after NATO co-founder Ernest Bevin".

At least one of the formulae for the Novichok class of nerve agents was published in a book in 2008, and following the Salisbury incident David Collum, a distinguished professor of organic chemistry at Cornell University, demonstrated that all of his first-year students had the theoretical knowledge to synthesise the toxin after he set it as an exam question.

In noting that Porton Down produces chemical weapons — almost certainly including Novichok — for the purposes of research, the Russian Embassy was not alleging that the chemical weapon supposedly used on the Skripals came from the chemical weapons laboratory just a few miles away from where they were found.

Rather, the embassy was pointing out that the alleged use of Novichok did not in and of itself implicate Russia in the attack on the Skripals, because other parties had the capability to make it.

Another reason the Russian Embassy wanted to make the point that the supposed use of Novichok did not ipso facto implicate the Russian state in the alleged attack on the Skripals is because that is what the UK Prime Minister at the time, Theresa May, said immediately after the incident.

On 12 March 2018, May told Parliament that the Skripals had been poisoned with "a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia", adding that "only two plausible explanations" were possible: either the Russian state had carried out the attack itself, or it had somehow lost control of its stockpiles of the nerve agent.

May made no allowance for the possibility that a Novichok-type agent could have been produced independently outside of Russia, and both alternatives she offered involved a degree of Russian state culpability: it was merely a question of whether this culpability was direct or indirect.

But she still offered two alternatives.

The response Hughes gave to the Russian Embassy's observation that Porton Down and other laboratories around the world were capable of producing Novichok — if they had not already — was dismissive.

> "It would be legitimate (and wholly unsurprising) if limited quantities were held in defence and security laboratories internationally, precisely and only for the purpose of making effective any reaction to malicious use by others," he wrote. (§3.121) "So, purely for the purposes of considering the argument advanced for the alternative narrative, I have considered the theoretical possibility that the nerve agent was available in the UK."

That was it. No account of this consideration that Hughes supposedly made was offered. As far as Hughes was concerned, nothing more needed to be said about the matter, even though the possibility that the Novichok in Salisbury might not have been deployed by the Russian state had initially been raised by the then UK prime minister. The implication was that such a possibility was absurd, and not worthy of further discussion.

It should be noted that the foreign secretary at the time of the Salisbury incident, Boris Johnson, claimed in an interview with the German media outlet Deutsche Welle on 20 March that "the guy" at Porton Down had told him personally that the Novichok supposedly used to poison the Skripals had been definitively identified as having been manufactured in Russia. Johnson claimed that the Porton Down employee he had spoken with was "absolutely categorical" on this point.

"I asked the guy myself, I said, 'are you sure?'", Johnson said. "And he said, 'there's no doubt'. So we have very little alternative but to take the action that we have taken."

That action was expelling 23 Russian diplomats, which the UK did on 14 March 2018. Subsequent expulsions were carried out by nations allied to the UK: nine countries expelled diplomats on 26 and 27 March (US 60; Canada four; France, Germany and Poland four each; Ukraine 13; Australia two; Ireland one; Moldova three).

Johnson's claim about the source of the Novichok was subsequently shown to be a lie. The head of Porton Down at the time went on Sky News on 31 March and denied that anyone at the laboratory had definitively identified the Novichok as having been manufactured in Russia. But by that time the expulsions of Russian consular staff around the world had been carried out — and Johnson, then the UK's most senior

diplomat and later to become prime minister, never felt the need to address the deception he had used to justify them. The damage had been done.

Theresa May's early suggestion that the Novichok might not have come from the Russian state itself was also memory-holed and never mentioned again. However, it was not forgotten by the investigative journalist Nick Davies, author of the classic study of propaganda Flat Earth News, who commented that he had not seen any British journalist check a single element of the Skripal story, and that the quality of reporting on the case was as poor as the reporting that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had WMD.

4. There is said to be no satisfactory explanation for the "extraordinary coincidence" of the presence of Alison McCourt, Chief Nursing Officer of the British Army, at the scene of the Skripals' collapse, and the fact that this was not publicised until January 2019 (§3.117b)

In what does appear to be a remarkable coincidence, the first responders to the Skripals when they eventually succumbed to the supposed effects of Novichok on a bench in Salisbury included Colonel Alison McCourt — at the time the chief nursing officer of the British Army — and her teenage daughter Abigail.

As we know, the Skripals were apparently exposed to Novichok when they both touched the front door of Sergei's house on leaving in the early afternoon of 4 March 2018, and it took a couple of hours for the poison to take effect. During this period they drove into Salisbury and, after parking at a supermarket car park, fed ducks on the River Avon with some local boys.

They then went for a drink at a pub, followed by a meal at an Italian restaurant. On leaving the restaurant they sat on a bench in an open air shopping area in central Salisbury, and it was only then that the Novichok they had supposedly touched around two hours before incapacitated them.

Although the unsigned statement presented to the inquiry in Yulia's name says she began to feel unwell before Sergei, the full onset of effects must have been rapid and near-simultaneous in them both because neither was able to call out to passers-by for help on behalf of the other. The inquiry heard that they remained on the bench for more than 30 minutes before anyone realised they were in any kind of difficulty (source, p21).

Finally, however, Colonel McCourt's daughter Abigail apparently noticed that they were in distress, and brought this to the attention of her mother. The McCourts both then helped the Skripals as best they could, together with other people who also came to their aid.

About nine months later, in January 2019, Alison nominated her daughter for a bravery award presented by a local radio station, which is how the fact that the British Army's most senior nurse was one of the first responders to the Skripals at the bench became public knowledge. Understandably, the Russian Embassy remarked on this "extraordinary coincidence".

Hughes's reply to this was that, insofar as it was a coincidence, it was not an extraordinary one. "Alison McCourt lived near Salisbury," he wrote. "There is no reason whatsoever why she should not have been in the city with her husband and children on the day in question and, given her training, every reason why she should go to the assistance of the Skripals… I see nothing remotely extraordinary about her presence." (§3.121b)

Hughes made two other significant remarks in his reply.

> First, he wrote: "It is… extremely improbable that, if there had been some kind of orchestrated event involving [Alison McCourt] and a very dangerous poison, she would have involved her husband and children in close proximity to it."

Hughes was of course correct here. McCourt clearly did not think the Skripals had been affected by a "very dangerous poison", or she certainly would not have allowed her daughter to touch them in any way due to the risk of cross-contamination. It was later confirmed that neither of them had been contaminated by deadly nerve agent.

Hughes's second significant remark apparently related to Alison McCourt's mental health.

> "[O]nce there was publicity… after [Alison McCourt had nominated her daughter Abigail] for public service recognition for what she… did to help [the Skripals], that unwanted publicity, plus the injury which she and her daughter sustained did lasting damage to the family's health, including that of Alison McCourt," he wrote (§3.121b).

It is grimly comical to see Hughes referring here to "unwanted publicity" for Abigail McCourt, while in the same sentence noting that this publicity was the result of Abigail being nominated for public recognition by her own mother. But more seriously: what injury is Hughes referring to when he states there was "lasting damage to the [McCourt] family's health"?

As just noted, no-one in the McCourt family suffered physical harm from Novichok cross-contamination after coming into contact with the Skripals. It would instead appear that the injury Alison McCourt suffered was to her mental health. Specifically, it appears it was the response of the authorities in immediate aftermath of the alleged Novichok attack that caused her and her family mental trauma.

Like Charlie Rowley and the Skripals, Hughes excused Alison McCourt from giving oral testimony before the inquiry, so there was no opportunity to ask her about what she witnessed at the bench or how she felt about what happened afterwards. But in a signed statement she wrote:

> "In the aftermath of the incident I was given inconsistent information and directions by the police… I was told by police that my car did not need to be examined and there was no safety concern and I could continue driving it.
>
> "Then a week after the incident the police turned up at our house at 9pm without warning and confiscated our car keys and returned subsequently with the Army to remove our family car under full 'bio-hazard' conditions. I found this extremely distressing as my family and I had been using the car unprotected throughout the intervening period."

This account of mental trauma caused by the inconsistent approach the authorities took to the apparent danger of cross-contamination echoes that of DS Nick Bailey, a policeman who was the only person other than the Skripals to suffer significant symptoms as a result of the alleged Novichok contamination of the front door. He made a full physical recovery but said the authorities' response — which included destroying all his family's possessions — was

"heartbreaking" and "confusing", and he retired from the police force due to ongoing mental issues in October 2020. (§3.75)

We will look at his case and the question of cross-contamination in more detail presently.

5. There is said to be no satisfactory explanation for the presence at Salisbury District Hospital at the time of the admission of the Skripals of "staff trained to deal with nerve agent poisonings" (§3.117c)

As with the suggestion that the Skripals went out to a cemetery on the morning of the day they were allegedly poisoned and the suggestion that they turned off their mobile phones, it is notable that the Russian Embassy would ask why there were medical staff "trained to deal with nerve agent poisonings" at Salisbury District Hospital at the time the Skripals were admitted. It is an unusually specific question that must have been prompted by a specific article or report.

In his response (§3.121c) Hughes flatly denies this was the case. He lists the medics and first responders who were involved, and says there is no suggestion they were a group of specialists trained in the treatment of nerve agent or organophosphate poisoning who were somehow fortuitously on hand. He writes:

There was "one [police] officer with general CBRN training, who was aware from literature (but not of course from personal experience) of possible signs of organophosphate poisoning"; Dr Cockroft, "the consultant initially responsible for the Skripals on Sunday night/Monday morning" who was "also aware, through literature, of organophosphate poisoning in agricultural contexts"; the microbiologist Dr Russell "who had CBRN training" and had "raised with Dr Cockroft… the possibility of nerve agent poisoning, but he did not press him about it"; and Dr James Haslam, who "had no particular CBRN or other relevant training".

> "There was a healthy debate amongst the doctors about what the cause of the Skripals' acute condition was," Hughes continues. (§3.121c, v) "The picture does credit to the scientific curiosity of the doctors, but it is far removed from there being a pre-arranged team of nerve agent experts assembled to deal with the Skripals after a staged contamination."

In interviews with Mark Urban for the BBC shortly after the Salisbury events, the medics at Salisbury District Hospital made it clear there had been no early suggestion that the Skripals had been exposed to a deadly nerve agent — the initial diagnosis and treatment, at least in the initial 24 hours, was opiate overdose (§3.63) — and so they took no special precautions for themselves to guard against the risk of cross-contamination (such as barrier nursing) while treating them.

But Hughes's response again leaves a question: how did the Russian Embassy get the impression that there had been "staff trained to deal with nerve agent poisonings" on hand at Salisbury District Hospital at the time the Skripals were admitted? It is not the kind of detail that the embassy would simply make up, although Hughes's dismissal of the point may imply it had done so.

Again it appears that — like the claim the Skripals went to the cemetery early in the morning of the day they were allegedly poisoned, and the claim they turned off their mobile phones for a few hours — it originated with the UK media: specifically in this case a former British Army colonel called Hamish de Bretton-Gordon.

As a former commanding officer of the UK's now-disbanded Joint CBRN Regiment, de Bretton-Gordon is frequently presented by the UK media as an expert in chemical weapons and military matters such as the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine — but he is given to making claims that could potentially be described as exaggerated, sensationalist or scaremongering.

For example, in May 2015 he said that jihadists returning from Syria to the UK could use a chemical from household fridges to make homemade chemical bombs that would "cause devastation if used in a British shopping centre or on the London underground", and in September 2015 he suggested the Islamic State in Syria had access to 20 tons of Mustard Gas that it could smuggle into Europe.

In February 2018, less than three weeks before the Salisbury events, de Bretton-Gordon wrote an article for the BBC saying that chemical weapons from Syria represented a threat to the West, and warned that although "Russia and the US have destroyed their chemical stocks… there is speculation that research has been done on new super chemicals many times more potent than nerve agents like Sarin and VX".

On 7 April 2018, a month after the Salisbury events and three months before Dawn Sturgess died, de Bretton-Gordon was interviewed for an article in The *Daily Mail* headlined "The Novichok timebomb: Nerve agent used to poison former Russian spy and his daughter was specially designed to take four hours to kill them so their assassins could flee Britain."

De Bretton-Gordon, the article claimed, "has had access to secret intelligence relating to the poisoning".

The article's headline assertion that the Novichok the Skripals were supposedly exposed to had been "specially designed to take about four hours to kill them so their assassins could flee Britain" was abandoned and memory-holed by the UK after Dawn's death. This was because Rowley said Dawn had been affected within 15 minutes of "spraying" it on herself, and it was central to the UK's version of events that the Novichok in the Amesbury bottle was from exactly the same batch of Novichok as was supposedly used on Skripal's front door.

Testimony that the batch was the same was given to the inquiry by witnesses from Porton Down, which had apparently been able to carry out secret tests that other laboratories did not have time to do (§2.16).

This batch match was not confirmed by independent validation or earlier attempts to do so (source, paragraph 12).

Leaving that to one side, a passage from the article from The *Daily Mail* reads:

> "Completely by chance, doctors with specialist chemical weapons training were on duty at the hospital when the victims were admitted. They treated Sergei and Yulia Skripal with an atropine (antidote) and other medicines approved by scientists from Porton Down, the government's top secret scientific research laboratory."

It seems almost certain that de Bretton-Gordon was the source of this claim. In August 2018, he gave an interview to CTC Sentinel, the magazine of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, the United States military academy in New York. In the course of the interview he made various sensational claims, such as the claim

Syrian government forces were "mixing sarin with chlorine… and putting it into hand grenades", and that there was a risk of "a drone with… very pure chlorine on it crashing into a big [US] sporting stadium with… 80,000 people in it".

During this interview he was also asked about the Salisbury events and how the Skripals survived exposure to what was said to be an incredibly lethal nerve agent. He told the CTC Sentinel: "The survival of the Skripals was down to a huge amount of luck. Salisbury is very near to the British CBRN research center at Porton Down. There were two doctors on duty who had just done their CBRN course at Porton Down who very quickly thought it was nerve agent. So they were pumped full of atropine [a treatment for organophosphate poisoning]."

It is these reports that are the source of the Russian belief that "staff trained to deal with nerve agent poisonings" were on hand at Salisbury District Hospital at the time the Skripals were admitted.

However, as we have seen from Hughes's report and the testimony of the hospital staff, not only was it untrue that "there were doctors on duty [at the hospital] who had just done their CBRN course at Porton Down", but it was also untrue that the doctors at the hospital "very quickly thought it was a nerve agent".

As Hughes writes: "At the hospital, the initial working diagnosis was of opiate poisoning, which was the obvious first hypothesis… Salisbury had at the time experienced a considerable level of recreational opiate abuse and consequent poisoning, not infrequently manifesting itself in the central area where the Skripals were found". (§3.63)

It should be added that the initial hypothesis of the police, paramedics and doctors treating Dawn Sturgess was also that she had taken an opiate overdose, possibly the powerful synthetic opiate fentanyl.

This was partly because Charlie Rowley was a drug user known to the police. Charlie and Dawn were described by the police as "two well-known drug addicts" (source, p22), although the Sturgess family strongly rejected the suggestion that Dawn took hard drugs.

But it was also partly because one of the police officers who attended Rowley's Amesbury flat after Dawn collapsed there had also been a first responder two years before when Rowley's previous girlfriend, Natasha Davis, had died of an opiate overdose in his presence (source, p122).

When toxicology analysis was carried out on samples of Dawn's blood that were taken after she was admitted to hospital, fentanyl was found to be present. However, the pathologist Professor Guy Rutty told the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry he had not been informed of the levels at which it was present (source, p40).

One of the hospital's ICU consultants, Dr Stephen Jukes, told the inquiry that he had given Dawn fentanyl in hospital when she was put on mechanical ventilation (source, p167). This is notable because Dawn would not have needed pain relief as she was already profoundly unconscious due to catastrophic brain damage, and because fentanyl would be counter-indicated by a working diagnosis of fentanyl or opiate overdose.

These two factors made it impossible to determine if Dawn had taken fentanyl before she was taken to hospital.

6. It is said that, in an article published on 8 April 2018, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, misrepresented or misinterpreted remarks made in 2010 by Vladimir Putin, who was Prime Minister at the time, saying that he had made a televised threat that "traitors" would "kick the bucket " and "choke", whereas in fact Mr Putin had said that Russia did not use assassination, whilst "traitors" would "kick the bucket " of their own accord and "choke" on their "thirty pieces of silver " (§3.117d)

In the same article, the then Foreign Secretary was said to have misrepresented or misinterpreted Russian law in saying that it "allows the assassination of 'extremists' overseas", whereas in fact it was asserted that the law permits only the sending of formations of armed forces to combat terrorists and their bases abroad (§3.117e)

The article the Russian Embassy is referring to is an article first published in The Sunday Times, headlined "Boris Johnson: Russia's torrent of absurdity is soaked up by an 'infantile' Corbyn" and then republished on the UK government website, with several passages removed, as "Only Russia could have committed this crime: article by Boris Johnson".

Hughes largely agreed with the points that the Russian Embassy made in response to this article, but said they had no bearing on the question of whether or not the Salisbury incident had been staged by the UK.

Johnson had written:

> "Russia has an obvious motive for targeting Sergei Skripal. In the year that Skripal moved to Britain, President Putin made a televised threat that 'traitors' would 'kick the bucket' and 'choke'".

Hughes responded:

> "Mr Putin's public remarks in 2010 about 'traitors' did not amount to an assertion that they would be or should be assassinated. […] [T]hey were contemptuous of those so described and suggested that they would come to a bad ending, but the words used did not carry the implication put upon them by the then Foreign Secretary's interpretation, which overstates matters. I do not, however … consider that analysis … of Mr Putin's remarks provides any help at all on whether the Salisbury event was staged by the UK." (§3.121d)

Johnson also wrote: "The Russian Duma has actually passed a law that allows the assassination of 'extremists' overseas."

> Hughes responded: "This point [that Johnson misrepresented Russian law] is partly correct. Russian law… does not… authorise assassination, but it… authorises the President to permit the deployment of "sub-divisions of special operations federal security service organs" against terrorists and/or their bases outside Russia, "in order to eliminate a threat to the security of the Russian Federation". It is plainly possible that that could be taken to include a strike against an individual regarded by the Russian authorities as a threat to the country's security. But again, I do not consider that close interpretation of the terms of foreign legislation, nor of the Foreign Secretary's non-lawyer's comments upon it, assist in the resolution of the question whether the Salisbury event was staged by the UK." (§3.121e)

It is interesting to see what Johnson wrote in the passages that were cut from *The Sunday Times* article before it was republished by the UK government as an official document.

In the edited version, Johnson accuses the Kremlin of "running a cover-up" and suggests that the fact the Russian Embassy had come up with many alternative theories to explain what had happened to the Skripals was in itself evidence of Russian guilt. He suggests that the fact nations allied with the UK had expelled Russian diplomats from their territories in solidarity with the UK was also evidence of Russian guilt. He then invokes then-Prime Minister Theresa May's statement from 14 March saying that there is "no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian state was culpable for the attempted murder".

Concluding, Johnson mocks Russia for asking to be included in the investigation into the Salisbury events that was being undertaken by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which he likens to "a drunk driver insist[ing] on the right to join the police investigation into himself".

In the unedited version, Johnson has several paragraphs attacking Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the opposition Labour Party at the time. Corbyn, he writes, "cannot bring himself unequivocally to say that the Russian state was responsible" and says: "I repeated [Theresa May's] assessment [that the Russian state was culpable for the attempted murder of Skripal] in the interview I gave to the German media last month, an interview that Jeremy Corbyn claimed bizarrely was not backed up by the evidence".

The interview with German media Johnson refers to, of course, is the *Deutsche Welle* interview he gave on 20 March when he lied about Porton Down having established that the Novichok in Salisbury was made in Russia — and it was not Corbyn who had initially said that this claim was not backed up by the evidence, but the head of Porton Down.

Johnson's lie caused embarrassment for the UK Foreign Office, which had repeated his claim about the Russian provenance of Novichok and was subsequently obliged to delete its statement on Twitter when Porton Down denied it, but this was not something Johnson ever acknowledged.

Johnson's original article in The *Sunday Times* continues: "Remember Porton Down's verdict that the nerve agent required 'extremely sophisticated methods to create, probably something only in the capabilities of a state actor'. This effectively rules out Jeremy Corbyn's hypothesis that the Russian mafia was somehow responsible."

These, too, were false statements. As noted, Cornell's Professor Collum demonstrated that his first-year chemistry students had the capability to theoretically synthesise Novichok. More significantly, it was Theresa May who first suggested the Russian state might have somehow lost control of its stockpiles of the nerve agent and allowed them to fall into the hands of criminals. As already noted, this was a suggestion she quickly abandoned, without any explanation for why she had done so.

7. Russian requests for consular access to the Skripals were not granted (§3.117f)

The right of consular officials to visit or have access to a national of their country who is in prison, custody or "detained in any other manner" in a different country or "sending State" is provided for by Article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963). The key passage is this:

> Article 36(1)(c): "Consular officers shall have the right to visit a national of the sending State who is in prison, custody or detention, to converse and correspond with him and to arrange for his legal representation. They shall also have the right to visit any national of the sending State who is in prison, custody or detention in their district in pursuance of a judgement. Nevertheless, consular officers shall refrain from taking action on behalf of a national who is in prison, custody or detention if he expressly opposes such action."

The final sentence of this passage is what Hughes relied on in his response to the Russian Embassy's complaint that they had not been granted consular access to either Sergei (a dual British-Russian national) or Yulia (a Russian national only) Skripal in the aftermath of their alleged poisoning.

> "All the evidence shows that neither Sergei nor Yulia Skripal wished to avail themselves of consular assistance from Russia," Hughes wrote. (§3.121f)
> "The idea that [Sergei Skripal] wanted consular assistance from those who had convicted and imprisoned him is fanciful."

Given the testimony that Hughes had heard over the course of the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry hearings, for him to suggest that it is "fanciful" Skripal might want consular assistance — and dismiss such an important principle of international law on that basis alone — is extraordinary.

As we have noted, Hughes failed to speak to Skripal personally, having ruled that any appearance by either Sergei or Yulia, even by secure video link during the inquiry's secret sessions, would have exposed them to further risk of assassination by the Russian state.

But putting this to one side, Hughes was aware that Skripal's feelings around Russia and President Putin were complex. Hughes knew that Skripal regarded himself as a Russian patriot, and that he had mentally justified his betrayal of state secrets to the UK by convincing himself that they related to an entity that no longer existed: the Soviet Union.

In a passage from *The Skripal Files* — referred to in inquiry documents — Mark Urban writes that "[Skripal] is, or was at least when we were talking in 2017, an unashamed Russian nationalist, enthusiastically adopting the Kremlin line in many matters". Skripal was described as "cheer[ing] on Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea".

According to Urban, Skripal viewed Ukrainians as "incapable of leadership" who were "simply sheep who need a good shepherd [in Russia]". Urban also writes that "Skripal would… watch a good deal of television, devoting many hours to Pervy Kanal — Russia's First Channel… known for following the Putin line closely in its news coverage."

More than this, Hughes knew that the unsigned statement supplied to the inquiry in Skripal's name said he "had received a Presidential pardon and [believed he] was a free man with no convictions under Russian law". He also knew that transcripts of police interviews with Yulia Skripal from 2018 included her saying things like: "When [Sergei] was released from prison, officially all this case was erased so he able to travel back to Russia when he wants so everything is like he's a new person so, like he has no convictions, had no convictions at all, so he's clean and that's why he told me that FSB, other Russian agencies should be fine with him." (source, p14)

Skripal apparently told Mark Urban that he was scared of President Putin, and was reportedly very watchful. Nevertheless he had apparently refused to take basic security precautions — such as CCTV — at his home (source, par 27). His children Yulia and Alexander had been free to travel from Russia to see him for years, and there were accounts that Skripal had been visiting the Russian embassy in London because he was hoping to secure permission to return to Russia to visit relatives including his mother, who he called regularly before his alleged poisoning.

There were even accounts that Skripal had not wanted to be part of the 2010 spy swap that brought him to Salisbury in the first place, and he had instead wanted to serve out his time in prison so that he could remain in Russia afterwards, but the UK government had apparently insisted he was part of the exchange.

With all this information before him, Hughes nevertheless presumed to speak for Sergei Skripal without having spoken to him himself, ruling that Skripal continued to "expressly oppose" a visit from — or any communication with — Russian consular officials under the terms of the Vienna Convention, even though six-and-a-half years had passed.

Hughes's treatment of Yulia Skripal's case was similar, but even worse.

The evidence showing that Yulia did not wish to avail herself of Russian consular assistance "was particularly true of Yulia, who said so publicly, soon after recovering sufficiently to be discharged from hospital", Hughes writes, footnoting a document that was presented to the inquiry to support his assertion (source, paragraph 122; §3.121f).

The paragraph from this "open report", created in October 2024 by the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Policing Unit for the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry, reads: "On 23 May 2018, Yulia Skripal gave a short video interview to Reuters and provided the press with a handwritten statement."

The statement that Yulia gave an "interview" to Reuters is false and highly deceptive, suggesting that Yulia answered questions from the press and was able to speak freely about what had happened to her. This was untrue. Yulia merely read out a statement for the cameras, after which she was taken away, never to be seen again.

It should be noted as an aside here that the UK authorities clearly believed their ability to protect Yulia from further attacks from Russian assassins was good enough for her to be produced for the public on this one occasion. Why Hughes decided that the risk to Yulia had become too great for him to speak to her six years later is not something he explained.

But even in the context of the highly controlled conditions under which Yulia was briefly displayed for the international media in May 2018, the statement she read out undermined Hughes's determination that she did not want consular assistance.

> In her statement she said: "I'm grateful for the offers of assistance from the Russian Embassy but at the moment I do not wish to avail myself of their services."

She also said, "in the longer term I hope to return home to my country".

By saying "at the moment", Yulia was clearly reserving the opportunity to avail herself of the Russian Embassy's assistance at some point in the future. And what did Yulia mean when she said she wanted to return home to her country "in the longer term"? She made this statement in May 2018. Hughes then decided that she still held the same position with regard to Russian consular assistance six-and-a-half years later, apparently without having communicated with her in any way.

Was such a passage of time not "the longer term"?

With no regard for Yulia's current situation and welfare — whatever that may be, and there is no suggestion he knew — Hughes ignored that part of Yulia's statement, while claiming other parts still reflected her current view.

And yet this was not even the worst aspect of Hughes's response to Yulia Skripal as an individual and a citizen of the Russian Federation: a woman who had seemingly become innocent collateral damage in an alleged assassination attempt on her father.

When the Skripals were admitted to hospital, Hughes writes, "[n]either could breathe unaided, and both were experiencing multiple organ dysfunction and profound compromise of the central and peripheral nervous systems". (§3.62) "They were very nearly killed, and the injury done to them, short of that, was enormous." (§3.69)

As we have seen, contrary to the claims of Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, the Skripals were not treated by doctors who by strange good fortune had recently completed CBRN training at Porton Down. Instead they were diagnosed and treated for a suspected opiate overdose in the initial 24 hours of their hospitalisa tion. (§3.63)

But de Bretton-Gordon's false statements about the hospital's early diagnosis and response had a foundation in something he knew to be true: that if people are admitted to hospital with "profound compromise of the central and peripheral nervous systems" that is genuinely due to nerve agent poisoning, then a swift and accurate diagnosis followed by aggressive treatment is essential if the victims are to stand any chance of survival.

As we have noted, this did not happen. The Skripals did not receive a swift and accurate diagnosis, although this was in no way the fault of the medical staff at Salisbury District Hospital. There is an overlap of symptoms, but the treatment for opiate overdose is not by some miracle also the correct treatment for nerve agent poisoning.

In his media appearances, de Bretton-Gordon had described Novichok as a "super-weapon of mass destruction". He told the Forces News website that Novichok was "possibly the most toxic man-made chemical ever produced". But if this was true — and Novichok was genuinely more deadly than a nerve agent like VX — then even with correct treatment, severe and permanent injury to the Skripals should have been certain, given that they both received a dose sufficient to cause them to collapse.

As a result de Bretton-Gordon was caught between the reality of the Skripals' recovery and the claims he had made about the lethality of the poison they had allegedly been exposed to.

Although they were not "nerve agent experts" like de Bretton-Gordon, the doctors at Salisbury District Hospital who were treating the Skripals were aware from medical literature of the extreme toxicity of weaponised organophosphate neurotoxins such as VX. For this reason, when they were

informed by Porton Down that their early diagnosis of opiate overdose was not correct and the Skripals had supposedly been exposed to a nerve agent in the VX class, they expected the Skripals to die.

However, the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry heard testimony that confounded these expectations, and introduced questions about the nature and purpose of the treatment Yulia, if not Sergei, received. This testimony in turn raised questions about the character of the inquiry and the role Hughes carried out within it, exposing a tension between the clinical reality and the official story that would have caused the proceedings to collapse if Hughes had not been willing to overlook the implications of what he was told.

On day nine of the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry, the ICU consultant at Salisbury District Hospital who had been on duty at the time the Skripals were admitted, Dr Stephen Cockroft, gave oral testimony. He told the inquiry that, just four days after she was hospitalised, Yulia unexpectedly recovered consciousness during what is known as a "sedation hold" — a reduction in the sedation she was receiving while she was on a ventilation machine. Such sedation holds are common practice in ICUs and are carried out daily or even more frequently, as they are known to improve outcomes and help clinicians evaluate the physical and neurological health of patients who are being kept in a state of unconsciousness, or what is sometimes called a medical coma. (§3.62)

Yulia did not simply recover consciousness after her sedation was reduced: she exhibited a high level of neurological function. She became panicked, and attempted to get out of her hospital bed even though she was intubated and had cannulas in her veins. Witnessing this, Dr Cockroft said he was "gobsmacked" because he believed Yulia would have suffered profound and permanent brain injury.

> "This was a girl I thought would never move again," he told the inquiry. "I never thought she would be capable of having a conversation. I was quite convinced she had suffered catastrophic brain damage and I couldn't believe that she could be as neurologically intact as she obviously was."

Because she was unable to speak due to intubation, Dr Cockroft communicated with Yulia by asking her to blink yes or no to questions he asked her. He discovered by doing so that Yulia believed she had been sprayed with a substance while she and Sergei were in the restaurant, rather than by touching a poison that had been put on the door handle of Sergei's house an hour or so before they went out for lunch. (source, par77)

Hughes dismissed all this, saying Dr Cockroft had asked Yulia "leading questions" that were "clearly inappropriate" and concluding that "the exchange under sedation provides no reliable evidence at all about how Yulia Skripal was exposed to the Novichok" (§3.89)

This is a decision that contrasts with his acceptance of the testimony of Charlie Rowley about the Novichok perfume bottle — even though Rowley had no memory of finding this bottle due, at least in part, to his addiction to alcohol and heroin.

Dr Cockroft's discovery that Yulia possessed high neurological function challenged Hughes and the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry at a fundamental level.

From a clinical point of view, this event should mean placing the patient on a Bispectral Index monitor and using an Electroencephalogram to evaluate brain function. ICU protocol should also lead clinicians to continue with sedation holds, and — if the patient continues to respond well — remove them from ventilation as soon as safely possible.

Some of these procedures may have been carried out, but there is no way of knowing. All we know is that Yulia said she was under sedation for almost three weeks in total, and made no mention of waking up after just four days when she gave her brief public statement in May 2018.

Dr Cockroft was reprimanded by the clinical director of Salisbury Hospital after discovering that Yulia had not suffered severe neurological injury due to her alleged exposure to Novichok, and for asking her questions about what had happened. He was immediately removed from the ICU rota. The Skripals were placed under the exclusive care of a different doctor, and Cockroft was threatened with a charge of serious misconduct if he spoke to any of his colleagues about what he had witnessed.

Dr Cockroft was allowed back on to the ICU rota after the Skripals were discharged but shortly afterwards resigned, ending a distinguished 25-year career at Salisbury District Hospital (source, par12).

Hughes was presented with evidence that Yulia had not suffered severe damage to her nervous system only a few days after she was admitted to hospital, even though she had supposedly been severely injured by the most deadly nerve agents in existence. The implications in terms of the events he was supposed to be investigating were profound.

It also seems Yulia was not allowed to wake up again for two weeks following her initial recovery after just four days. Was this medically necessary? Was Yulia granted full agency, or made aware of the offer of Russian consular assistance that had been extended to her at this point?

Could Yulia be being held against her will?

Hughes ignores this question. He merely wrote that "[f]or much of [the Skripals'] time in hospital, they were maintained in a coma". (§3.62)

8. Russian requests for access to samples from the patients or elsewhere were not granted (§3.117g)

The widely-mocked idea that the Russian state should be allowed to test blood samples from the Skripals was one of the most significant aspects of the Salisbury incident. Jeremy Corbyn, then leader of the Labour Party, was the only prominent British politician who suggested the idea should be taken seriously.

On 14 March 2018, Corbyn told the House of Commons: "The Prime Minister said on Monday: 'Either this was a direct act by the Russian state… or the Russian Government lost control of their potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others.' Our response must be decisive, proportionate and based on clear evidence. If the Government believe that it is still a possibility that Russia negligently lost control of a military-grade nerve agent, what action is being taken through the OPCW with our allies?"

> Corbyn continued: "Has the Prime Minister taken the necessary steps under the chemical weapons convention to make a formal request for evidence from the Russian Government under article IX(2)? How has she responded to the Russian Government's request

> for a sample of the agent used in the Salisbury attack to run their own tests? Has high-resolution trace analysis been run on a sample of the nerve agent, and has that revealed any evidence as to the location of its production?"

As we have seen, trace analysis on the nerve agent run at Porton Down was unable to produce any evidence about the location of the nerve agent's production, although then Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson would lie about this very point just six days after Corbyn's question to Prime Minister Theresa May — a lie that justified the mass expulsion of hundreds of Russian diplomats from embassies around the world.

And as we also know, May never returned to her suggestion to the House of Commons that the Russian state might not have been directly responsible for the poisoning of the Skripals — a striking bit of memory-holing.

The "article IX(2)" Corbyn was referring to is Article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which establishes mechanisms for consultations, co-operation and fact-finding among States Parties [states that have signed the CWC, which include Russia and the UK] in cases of alleged chemical weapon use or compliance concerns.

The relevant passage is this:

> Each State Party has the right to request clarification from another State Party on any situation which may be considered ambiguous or which gives rise to a doubt about the compliance of that State Party with this Convention. The requested State Party shall provide, as soon as possible but no later than 10 days after the receipt of the request, the clarification sought.

It is under the broad definition of "clarification" that the Russian Embassy on 13 March 2018 "demand[ed] that samples of the chemical substance to which the British investigation is referring be provided to Russian experts for analysis within the framework of a joint investigation".

This demand was widely mocked in the UK media — as well as by many UK politicians.

After Corbyn questioned May about the Salisbury events in the House of Commons, the BBC Photoshopped his face onto a dark red background of Red Square and darkened his cap to make it look like a traditional Russian ushanka hat. The BBC then used this as a backdrop graphic that evening on its flagship current affairs programme Newsnight.

Hughes, while not adopting the puerile posture of the BBC or the mocking tone of the UK media, took the same attitude: that the Russians were guilty — or at least the evidence pointed to Russian guilt — and therefore the idea that an accused party should be allowed to actually see the evidence their accuser claims to have against them is risible.

Foundational principles of justice such as the presumption of innocence or transparency of evidence were, in Hughes's judgment, meaningless in cases like this. "Given that there were, at the least, grounds for suspecting Russian involvement in the poisoning of the Skripals, it is not surprising that access to the samples, which would entail the possibility of interference with or misrepresentation of them, should not be given," he wrote. "The best evidence of the information to be derived from the samples is the independent analysis of them by the OPCW." (§3.121g)

In applying the assumption of guilt to justify the UK's refusal to supply the Russian state with biological and environmental samples taken from the Skripals and the front door handle of Skripal's house, Hughes was overlooking the methodology that the OPCW — the international chemical weapons watchdog known as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons — employs to carry out analysis in cases like these.

This involves two approved laboratories receiving samples in secret, with neither of the laboratories involved in the testing process knowing which other approved laboratory has also been asked to test a split of the same samples. Once they have carried out their analysis, these laboratories return their results to the OPCW where they are compared and, if they are found to match, a definitive finding can be announced. Such "double-blind" testing is well-established scientific methodology that Hughes should have been aware of.

But in the Salisbury case, no fewer than four OPCW laboratories were involved in the testing process — two analysing the biological samples from the Skripals, and two from the door handle. This was, then, in some sense a "quadruple blind" process designed specifically to eliminate the possibility of error or fraud: or what Hughes called the potential for "interference with or misrepresentation [of]" samples.

This "interference or misrepresentation" is what Hughes was suggesting Russian laboratories would attempt, and that is why he said such an opportunity "should not be given" to the party he believed to be guilty. However, the OPCW methodology would have made it impossible for Russian laboratories to doctor samples supplied to them. Had they attempted to do so they would have had to explain why no less than four OPCW laboratories had produced different results.

None of this context was offered by the BBC at the time it was Photoshopping Corbyn to look like a Soviet agent on Newsnight. Instead the British establishment — the government and its media channels — united to pour scorn on the suggestion that those who are accused of a crime should be allowed to examine the evidence that their accuser claims to have against them.

The Russian state subsequently alleged that leaked information showed one of the OPCW laboratories testing the Skripals' blood samples had found they contained the precursor chemicals of a non-lethal, hallucinogenic incapacitant known as BZ, the effects of which can last for about four days. The OPCW responded that this had been deliberately introduced to the samples as a control substance.

Hughes saw no reason to question why the OPCW would add evidence of a military-grade hallucinogen to the Skripals' blood samples after they were taken (§3.119) even though he knew that Sergei was "chanting incomprehensibly" when he was found (§3.17) and witnesses had described him as staring at the sky and making strange gestures with his hands.

9. It was obvious that there must have been a CCTV camera recording Sergei Skripal's house, but its product had not been made available (§3.117h)

The response Hughes offers to this point is characteristically curt. "There was no CCTV outside (or inside) the Skripals' home," he writes. (§3.121h) He makes no further comment.

Not only was there no CCTV at Skripal's house, but the inquiry believes the two Russian secret agents

approached the building during a period when they disappeared completely from Salisbury's wider CCTV network. The closest the secret agents were seen to Skripal's house on CCTV was by cameras at a petrol station about half a kilometre from where he lived, after which they entered the first CCTV "black hole": a 16-minute period when they are supposed to have walked into the cul-de-sac where Skripal lived and used their fake perfume bottle of Novichok to contaminate his front door while he and Yulia were inside.

As we have noted, the reason there was no CCTV on Skripal's house was because he had apparently refused to have it installed when given the opportunity to do so. If this is true, the question becomes: why would someone in his position not want to take such simple security precautions? Domestic CCTV systems were already common in 2018 and quite unremarkable, as were other basic security systems such as house alarms and motion activated security lights, neither of which Skripal had either.

The unsigned statement that was supplied to the inquiry in Skripal's name contains remarks that are strangely at odds with his comment delivered to Mark Urban that he was scared of Putin, and that he felt he still possessed "top secrets" that were "really dangerous for Russian special services".

Skripal had apparently been offered the opportunity to change his identity when he arrived in the UK but chose not to do so because he wanted to maintain his relationships with his family back in Russia. Hughes defended this decision, saying "Sergei Skripal was not of a character readily to adapt to [changing his identity, which could]… only have been accomplished with his consent, and he plainly would not willingly have accepted [it]. (§6.29)

And as we have seen, Skripal seemingly believed he was a free man under Russian law having received a presidential pardon, and his children had certainly been able to travel to visit him in Salisbury from Russia. Yulia even told UK police that she believed her father was free to return to Russia "when he wants" (source, p14).

Skripal apparently felt the spy swap protocol that had led to his release from prison and retirement in the UK would be respected by the Russian state, and he would be left alone — and indeed he was left alone for eight years.

However, the inquiry also heard that Skripal had recently "re-entered the [espionage] game" (source, p16) and was undertaking "work with the United Kingdom and other western intelligence and military agencies that was directly contrary to Russia's malign global interests, including exposing Russian agents, passing secret information abroad and providing briefings on Russia to foreign intelligence agencies… in the period shortly before he was attacked". This was presented as the motive for the Russian state to make an assassination attempt against him.

This is the strangely contradictory information and testimony that Hughes heard about Skripal's sense of personal security living in Salisbury, and the threat Skripal believed he was living under or could have taken reasonable steps to mitigate. But the specific rationale Skripal provided in his unsigned statement for not having CCTV on his house was perhaps the strangest and most contradictory testimony of all.

> "CCTV was recommended but I declined this because I did not want to make my house conspicuous or live under surveillance," his statement reads.

Who does Skripal imagine would be watching him if he had installed CCTV at his home? These systems watch the outside of houses, not the people inside them. When such CCTV systems are installed in homes or business premises, the owner controls who has access to the recordings.

And how would CCTV system outside Skripal's house make it conspicuous? That they are a visible deterrent is to a large extent the point of these cameras.

The rationale is bizarre and, under Skripal's circumstances, strains credulity to the extreme.

But this bizarre rationale was merely a taster for what was to come. Hughes returned to the CCTV question later in his report, presenting a cluster of circular arguments that made the suggestion Skripal didn't want a camera outside his house because it might be "conspicuous" seem reasonable and well thought through.

> "It is clear that this attack showed considerable determination and was expected to stand as a public demonstration of Russian power," Hughes wrote. (§6.37) "Attackers willing to run the risk of being seen approaching the front door by the occupants or by neighbours… were not likely to be deterred by cameras, hidden or otherwise, if their plan was to be on a plane leaving the country the same evening."

Hughes's assertion that "[a]ttackers willing to run the risk of being seen approaching the front door by the occupants or by neighbours… [are] not likely to be deterred by cameras" is a textbook example of the question-begging fallacy, a form of circular logic by which someone who makes a claim assumes the truth of their claim.

There is no evidence that the alleged attackers ran the risk of approaching the front door. This is because they were not seen by the occupants or neighbours. But Hughes treats an unproven allegation — that the Russians contaminated Skripal's door, even though they weren't seen doing so — as established fact, and then uses this "fact" to claim that the absence of evidence of the two Russians doing what he says they did isn't important.

Hughes's logic works like this.

We believe the two Russians contaminated the door; therefore

They approached the door; therefore

They approached the door despite risk of being seen; therefore

They were willing to risk being seen; therefore

CCTV wouldn't have deterred them; therefore

The absence of CCTV doesn't matter.

Although, as we know, Hughes has suggested that the two Russian secret agents had acted to mitigate the risk of being tracked while on their alleged assassination mission — by turning off their mobile phones when they arrived in Salisbury, for example — he generally characterised them as having a bizarre and cavalier attitude to the risks they were taking, including the extreme risk to their own health presented by handling a lethal nerve agent, apparently without protective equipment.

This is perhaps clearest in his suggestion that the two secret agents

went into a public toilet in Salisbury after contaminating Skripal's door and took apart their fake perfume bottle of nerve agent there, removing the pump dispenser cap from the bottle. They then supposedly place the two parts of the nerve agent coated bottle into a presentation box, and sealed it in plastic using a portable heat sealer that they had brought with them. (§4.71)

This near-suicidal manoeuvre on the part of the two Russian secret agents represents pure speculation on the part of the inquiry. It was inserted into the narrative to explain the fact that Charlie Rowley had said during an interview with ITV News in July 2018 that the bottle he supposedly found was in two parts inside a sealed box.

Not only this, Rowley said he had spilled Novichok on his hands in the process of assembling the bottle before he gave it to Dawn. His survival was attributed to the fact he said he had washed his hands under the tap (source, p4).

The lead counsel to the Dawn Sturgess Inquiry, Andrew O'Connor KC, suggested that, after taking the bottle apart in a public toilet and sealing it in a presentation box using their portable heat sealer, the two secret agents then almost immediately dumped the package in a bin, where Rowley supposedly found it later (source, p165).

All this allegedly occurred during the second "black hole" in the CCTV of the secret agents' movements around Salisbury — a 33-minute period when they once again vanished completely.

10. There was an inexplicable lack of adverse reaction in any of those who attended to the Skripals at the bench (§3.117i)

We have noted that Colonel Alison McCourt and her daughter Abigail were not cross-contaminated by Novichok after coming to the aid of the Skripals at the bench. There was also no cross-contamination of Dr Helen Ord, a medical doctor who was passing by and attended to Yulia in particular. No members of the public who also came to help were contaminated either.

The police and paramedics who responded to the Skripals were unaffected, and the medics at Salisbury hospital who treated them believing they had taken an opiate overdose were not contaminated. None of the bar or restaurant staff who handled the glasses, plates or utensils that the Skripals touched with their contaminated hands were affected.

The ducks that the Skripals fed with bread from their contaminated hands were unharmed, as were the boys who joined them: although it seems the deputy chief of the CIA may have lied to President Trump about this, falsely claiming that ducks were killed and boys were injured — and showing him photographs of some kind — in order to persuade him to join in with the mass expulsion of Russian diplomats from embassies around the world on 26 and 27 March 2018.

Who, then, does Hughes say actually was contaminated at the bench? In his response, he writes that there was "serious injury" to "DS Bailey, and … lesser but significant [injuries] suffered by PC Bell, Alison McCourt and her daughter, and VN005". (§3.121i)

As we have seen, Colonel McCourt and her daughter were not affected by Novichok but by subsequent mental trauma relating to the authorities' response. DS Bailey was allegedly affected by Novichok after being exposed at Skripal's house, as was PC [Oliver] Bell, "who had been the guard posted outside Sergei Skripal's house … [and who later] experienced twitching and pain in one eye". (§3.76) Bell "was … taken that night to the hospital [but was] not detained". VN005, the code name of another policeman "who [also] went into the house … experienced a complete loss of sensation in a finger for several days afterwards". (§3.77) VN005 went to hospital two days later, but he was told a blood test was unnecessary and sent home.

This means that not one of the people Hughes mentions in reply to the Russian Embassy's question about "an inexplicable lack of adverse reaction in any of those who attended to the Skripals at the bench" were affected by Novichok at the bench: Bailey, Bell and VN005 were all apparently affected by Novichok at Skripal's house, and the McCourts were not affected by Novichok at all.

The explanation Hughes offers for the complete lack of cross-contamination among the people who were at the bench is that "the risk of person-to-person spread is much less than the hazard of contact by the first person with the poison" (§3.121i). This was contrary to the claims of Vil Mirzayanov, a Soviet scientist who had apparently helped to develop Novichok before defecting to the US, and who had written the book that included a formula for it. Mirzayanov said that "trace contamination [presented a risk] to hundreds of members of the British public who may have been in the vicinity of the attack".

Many members of the public did in fact attend Salisbury hospital believing they had been affected by Novichok. Mainstream outlets such as Channel 4 reported that "the Novichok poisonings in 2018 resulted in 87 people going to A&E", while omitting the fact that none of these 87 people were affected by anything other than the public anxiety Channel 4 was helping to cause.

Something more needs to be said about DS Bailey. Like PC Bell and VN005, he went to hospital after they had conducted a search of Skripal's house on the Sunday night, initially going to A&E on Monday afternoon because he "wasn't feeling right". Like both PC Bell and VN005 he was given the "all clear" by the hospital and sent home (source, p79). However he returned the following morning after a night of fever and hallucinations, and was then hospitalised for 17 days before being discharged.

Unlike the Skripals, Bailey was not sedated or put on ventilation, and he said he was "conscious the whole time" of his hospital stay. Reports of his condition and prognosis varied, with the narrative changing over time to suggest he was far sicker than he was originally reported to be. Outlets such as The Independent and The Mirror reported that he was "well" and "sitting up and talking" on 8 March, just three days after his admission. But by 2020 the same media outlets were reporting that there had been "a real expectation he would not survive" and that he "almost died".

As we have noted, Bailey made a full physical recovery but found the "emotional battering and psychological impact" of his experience far more challenging, particularly the "devastating effect on his family" after the authorities destroyed everything in his house, including his children's toys, due to the apparent risk of cross-contamination.

> "While I was in hospital, my family were told they had to leave our house because I'd accidentally taken nerve agent back to the house and

> contaminated the house, and they had to leave because it wasn't safe," he said on a podcast afterwards (from 14min 12sec). "There was an enormous feeling of guilt that I'd unintentionally done this […] and then when my name […] was released to the press and it went around the world […] I completely shut down […] I couldn't take any more stress."

Although their physical injuries amounted to a fever and hallucinations, a twitching eye and a numb finger, "[t]he evidence of the collateral injuries to DS Bailey, PC Bell and others provides a good illustration of the power of the Novichok to cause substantial harm even to those who only had quite tangential contact with it," Hughes wrote. (§3.76) "The potential for damage up to and including death amongst innocent people unconnected to the Skripals ought not to be underestimated." (§3.80)

> "It is a mark of the management of the various scenes – the house, the pub and the restaurant… and the bench area where Sergei and Yulia Skripal became unwell… by Wiltshire police that the potentially very large incidence of contamination and injury was kept to the minimum that it was," Hughes continued.

In fact the house was not recognised as an area of potential contamination for several days, and BBC Wiltshire reported police going in and out of the door two days after the alleged attack with "little or no protective clothing" to search the property, in the process of which they apparently unwittingly spread Novichok all over the house (source, p36). The pub and restaurant each operated for a full day before being shut down. And once again: no-one who came into contact with the Skripals at the bench was contaminated at all.

11. There was no explanation for the fact that the Skripals collapsed more or less simultaneously despite being of different physical characteristics, including build, age and gender (§3.117j)

We have already considered the near-simultaneous nature of the Skripals' collapse, but to repeat: the point is not that they collapsed at exactly the same point in time, but that the onset of effects was sufficiently rapid in them both such that neither was able to call out to passers-by for assistance on behalf of the other.

The response that Hughes offers to this critical point is opaque.

> He writes: "The expert evidence demonstrated that the reactions of Sergei and Yulia Skripal to the exposure to the Novichok would be expected to be affected by variables such as the level of dose (probably greater for Sergei, who used the front-door handle first); difference in weight (leading to more rapid and worse effects for the lighter Yulia); the administration of atropine to Sergei but not to Yulia; and other factors affecting the rate at which different bodies metabolise an intruding substance." (§3.121j)

This, once again, is the end of the matter as far as Hughes is concerned. And, once again, nothing in his response addresses the question — in this case, how or why the Skripals would have been overcome almost simultaneously. In fact Hughes's response seems to do the reverse, and would be more easily understood as an explanation why they would not have collapsed at the same time, with so many variables involved.

However, the reference Hughes makes to Sergei being given atropine, a drug used to treat nerve agent poisoning and organophosphate poisoning in general, is significant and deserves more attention.

Sergei was apparently given atropine by accident by one of the paramedics who responded to the Skripals at the bench, following a supposed mix-up of drugs in the back of an ambulance. In what was presented as an extraordinarily fortuitous mistake, the paramedic who supposedly gave Sergei atropine thought he was giving him a different drug for a different diagnosis. This, of course, was the initial working diagnosis of the paramedics and the doctors at Salisbury hospital's ICU: fentanyl or opiate overdose, and the paramedic apparently believed he was giving Sergei the drug naloxone when he actually gave him atropine. (§3.61)

The fact that Sergei supposedly received atropine at the scene — while Yulia did not — was used by the inquiry to explain the fact that Sergei was reportedly in a significantly better condition than Yulia when they arrived at hospital, even though he was said to have received a higher dose of Novichok because had supposedly touched the contaminated front door handle before Yulia did, removing some of it when he did so.

While the apparent accidental administration of atropine to Sergei is extraordinary in itself, this is said to have happened after police and paramedics arrived. So the fact that Sergei received atropine at the scene does nothing to explain the apparent near-simultaneous onset of the effects of Novichok in both Sergei and Yulia before the emergency services were called, and it is disingenuous for Hughes to mention it as if it in any way helps to explain this question.

This concludes the explicit responses Hughes gave to the Russian Embassy's points — or at least, those he chose to address. However, it was not the end of the consideration Hughes gave in his report to the possibility that the event had been staged, and we will conclude by looking at these.

Hughes made six points of his own about the staging hypothesis, largely similar and based on a circular appeal to incredulity: that is, they were repeated expressions of Hughes's personal disbelief that staging would be possible, based on his restricted interpretation of what staging would entail. As such analysis of them will require returning to many of the points that have been made, serving as a summary of this article.

His first point returns to the question of the two Russians' arrival.

(§3.123) I here confront directly the question whether the Salisbury event could have been staged by the UK as a device for discrediting Russia. It is necessary to think about what a staged event, if it had taken place, would have had to entail:

a. If any such staged process took place, that would mean that those who staged it must have taken advantage of the fortuitous arrival in the UK of two Russian travellers to blame Russian hands for the attack

The expression of personal disbelief Hughes makes here is the phrase "fortuitous arrival". As we have seen, the two "Russian travellers" had already visited the UK at least once — in December 2016 — before they returned in March 2018. They stayed in the same hotel that they had stayed in two years previously, and booked it under the same aliases they used two years previously — aliases that they had used since at least 2014. As we also know, the two secret agents made their visa applications to enter the UK for their March 2018

assassination mission in late 2017, and had travelled on passports that had sequential numbers "consistent with … passports … issued in coordination" with the Russian secret service. (§3.36)

Hughes is suggesting that none of these facts represented an opportunity for the UK authorities to have identified the two secret agents in the period before the Salisbury events. If they had been identified in this period, then staging those events would not have required the "fortuitous" arrival in the UK of the two Russians, because they would already be on the surveillance radar of the UK secret services.

The Sturgess family would be entitled to suggest that the fact the two Russians were not on the radar of the UK security services by early 2018 represented negligence on their part — or what the Sturgess family's lawyer, Michael Mansfield KC, called the "abject failure by the United Kingdom Government to protect the United Kingdom public". This charge was in large part the basis of the case that the Sturgess family brought against the UK state, and the basis on which they forced the inquiry to be held — but it was not a charge Hughes accepted, and he absolved the security services of responsibility for this apparent failure in the next paragraph.

b. Even if the UK authorities could have known in advance that these convenient scapegoats were coming to the UK, there is no suggested way in which any plan of theirs to visit Salisbury could have been known before the morning of Saturday 3 March. Until it was known that they were going there, the contrived target of any staged attack (i.e. Sergei Skripal) could not have been settled upon

The expression of personal disbelief Hughes makes here is the phrase "no suggested way". Here Hughes uses qualified language to absolve the UK security services of responsibility for failing to identify the two Russians as potentially malign actors or agents of the Russian secret services. Again, he is saying that there was nothing about their activities since 2014 that suggested anything suspicious, and no means by which they could have been recognised as a threat and put under surveillance by the UK security services before the Salisbury incident in 2018.

Hughes also makes a basic logical error. He suggests that Sergei Skripal could only have become the "contrived target" after the Russians' Salisbury plans became known to the UK authorities. But this is an inversion of the staging possibility he is supposedly considering, through which he creates a false scenario that is easy for him to dismiss.

If the UK authorities staged this incident to blame Russia, the sequence would work in reverse. Skripal would be identified by the UK as the "target" first, and the "attack" would then be staged when the UK authorities knew the two Russians, who they had under surveillance, would be in Salisbury. Why the two Russian secret agents would come to Salisbury if not to assassinate Skripal is an open question—but let's say it was to meet him for some reason, rather than kill him.

Could the two Russians have been under surveillance? Hughes concedes the possibility in the next paragraph, but not the possibility that their activities in the months and years before they arrived in the UK on their supposed assassination mission could have brought them to the attention of the UK security services before March 2018. Rather, the only possibility he considers is the possibility that they came under surveillance the day before they allegedly carried out their attack: the possibility that they had been under surveillance for any significant period of time before the Salisbury events is ignored.

c. Even if one assumes (without evidence) that the men were under surveillance, it would have to follow that the UK authorities decided on Saturday, when the men got rail tickets for travel to Salisbury, to stage a false attack on Sergei Skripal

The expression of personal disbelief Hughes makes here is the phrase "it would have to follow". But what he says has "to follow" only follows from the false logic he has used to build up to this point. Having stated that there is "no suggested way" the Russians could have been under surveillance before their arrival in the UK in March 2018, Hughes then considers an impossibly short imaginary timeframe in which he does entertain the possibility that the two Russians were being tracked by the UK authorities.

The other notable phrase Hughes uses parenthetically here is "without evidence". Nowhere in his report does he indicate that he asked the UK security services if they had the two Russians under active surveillance at any point before the Salisbury events. While this may seem like an unlikely thing for him to have done, it would in fact address the concerns of the Sturgess family — whose interests he is in some sense supposed to represent — simply and directly. Instead, having failed to look for this evidence, Hughes then states there is no evidence: more circular logic defined by the banal truism 'you don't find what you don't look for'.

While he implies that UK intelligence were outwitted, and were so taken off guard by the Salisbury events that the only possibility they had to stage the events arose the day before, Hughes also suggests that the Russian intelligence service has a more effective surveillance capability than their British counterparts.

The Russians, he suggests, had been watching the Skripals — or Yulia Skripal, at least — for some time before they were apparently poisoned. Discussing Russian intelligence monitoring of Yulia Skripal, he writes: "It was obvious that her communications and her movements could readily be monitored, not least simply by checking her airline bookings (to which Russian intelligence service access could reasonably be expected)." (§6.40) He also says that UK intelligence believed Russian secret services had "cyber targeted Yulia Skripal's email accounts from about 2013" and that surveillance of her movements would be "scarcely surprising". (§6.22)

Hughes ascribes to the UK secret services none of this competence, capability, or capacity for long-term planning when considering the possibility that the Salisbury events had been staged. He gives the UK secret services just a day to do so in reaction to the two Russians' arrival in the country: a window of opportunity that he is then able, in the next paragraph, to dismiss as being "absurdly short".

d. If a false attack were going to be staged, by applying Novichok to the front-door handle or otherwise, then in practice it would have to happen that day, for there was no possible way for the UK authorities to know that the two men would return to Salisbury on Sunday 4 March; they themselves say that they did not decide until the Saturday to do that, and there can be no suggestion that they told anyone in authority or did anything which would indicate such a plan. Time was accordingly absurdly short

The two Russian secret agents made two visits to Salisbury during their stay in the UK in March 2018, travelling to the city on both Saturday 3 March and Sunday 4. Hughes characterised the first visit as a reconnaissance mission to survey "access routes" to Skripal's house (§3.49, §8.10b). Skripal himself was not in Salisbury on the Saturday afternoon, having travelled to Heathrow airport to collect Yulia, and Andrew O'Connor KC suggested to the inquiry that the secret agents knew he would not be at home then because they had been intercepting his communications (source, p134).

The expression of personal disbelief that Hughes makes here is the phrase "no possible way". He is saying it would have been impossible for the UK authorities to have known that the two Russians would return to Salisbury on Sunday 4 March, given that they had visited the day before, and therefore impossible for the UK authorities to set them up by engineering the contamination of Skripal's door with Novichok to make it look like they had put it there. The UK authorities, Hughes suggests, simply wouldn't have the time to concoct such an elaborate plot.

However, if the UK authorities had put the Russians under surveillance years before — just as Hughes suggests the Russian authorities had put Yulia Skripal under surveillance years before, or had been intercepting their communications — then the logic of Hughes's argument falls apart.

Interestingly, Hughes here takes the account of the two secret agents partly at face value. He seems to believe what they said about their presence in Salisbury when they gave an uncomfortable and embarrassing interview on Russian television six months after the event, where they claimed to have only made the decision to go back to Salisbury on Sunday the day before. Somehow the widely-mocked interview that the two Russians gave, where they said they were tourists interested in Salisbury Cathedral, contained credible elements for Hughes when those elements supported his contention that there was no way the UK authorities could have had time to stage the Novichok events.

However, there is a far more fundamental flaw in the logic of the argument that Hughes is presenting. He assumes that the most basic element of the Salisbury narrative is true, whether or not it was carried out by the two Russians or the UK authorities — that is, that Novichok was applied to the front door handle of Skripal's home: or at least, Novichok was involved. Hughes is not in fact considering the possibility that the events were staged but the possibility that the UK secret services carried out essentially the same actions that the two Russians supposedly carried out, in order to blame these actions on them.

But staging by definition means the reported events of the narrative need not to have occurred as described by the UK authorities and mainstream media. If the Salisbury events had been staged by the British secret services, there is no reason to assume there was any Novichok on the front door handle of Skripal's home — or anywhere else — in the first place.

The false timeline constraints Hughes imposes — the "absurdly short" window of opportunity that the UK authorities would have needed to stage the Novichok events, and the suggestion that there was "no possible way" for the UK authorities to have anticipated the Russians' return to Salisbury on the Sunday after they had visited on Saturday — only matter if one accepts that staging the events actually involved spreading Novichok around Salisbury, synchronised with the suspects' presence there.

By confining his definition of staging to maintain key elements of the official narrative, rather than considering the possibility that these narratives were manufactured after the event, Hughes can dismiss the idea of a staged scenario as logistically impossible: an archetypal example of the logical fallacy known as a straw man.

And yet in the next paragraph he seems to come close to considering what a staged scenario might actually involve, if only for half a sentence.

e. More crucially, all the evidence… shows that the Novichok was not put on the front-door handle on Saturday and rather not until Sunday, nor did the Skripals suffer any adverse effects until Sunday

Here Hughes makes an expression of personal belief with the phrase "all the evidence shows". Having dismissed a very limited version of a staging hypothesis as logistically impossible because of the extreme time constraints he imposed on it, Hughes moves on to assert that the evidence proves the events occurred according to the official account. Novichok, he says, was not put on the front door handle of Skripal's house on Saturday, and he is surely right about that.

However, he then claims "all the evidence" shows the poison was put there the following day.

But to use Hughes's language: "if a false attack were going to be staged", then the evidence of Novichok on the door handle could have been faked. No actual Novichok would need to have been involved, not least because a nerve agent like VX would have been far too dangerous for the UK secret services to use while staging a poisoning event. A non-lethal incapacitant or hallucinogen could be used instead. Either way, if Hughes had been serious about considering a staging hypothesis, that is where he would have started: with the idea that the Novichok narrative was invented by the UK after the event, there was no Novichok spread around Salisbury on 4 March 2018, and Novichok was not in fact what poisoned the Skripals.

So let us do what Hughes did not. How would a staging hypothesis fit the evidence if there was no Novichok in Salisbury on Sunday, 4 March?

Let us imagine that the two Russians were not actually in Salisbury to kill Skripal. Let us imagine that they were somehow set up, and the Novichok narrative was fabricated by UK intelligence after the event.

How would this explain the evidence?

No Novichok would explain why Skripal's cat, shut in the house after it allegedly became contaminated, survived. Nash van Drake exhibited no symptoms of poisoning while he was in the house even though he had "likely" been exposed to the nerve agent, according to the inquiry. The cat was eventually euthanised "for its welfare" because it was "distressed".

No Novichok would explain why there was no mass casualty event among the police officers who were reported by BBC Wiltshire going in and out of the supposedly contaminated door "with little or no protective clothing" in the days after the door was allegedly contaminated, before it was identified as the supposed source of the contamination.

No Novichok would explain why pub and restaurant staff suffered no cross-contamination or ill effects after handling the glasses, plates and utensils that the Skripals had touched with hands that had supposedly been contaminated with deadly nerve agent shortly before. No Novichok would explain why the pub and restaurant could both remain open the following day without any members of the public being affected by the alleged contamination there — contamination supposedly so severe that it led to them both being shut down for a cleanup operation that lasted many months.

No Novichok would explain the complete absence of cross-contamination at the bench where the Skripals collapsed. No contamination of Colonel Alison McCourt, the British Army's chief nursing officer, or her teenage daughter Abigail. No contamination of Dr Helen Ord. No contamination of the members of the public who assisted. No contamination of the police officers who responded or the paramedics who treated the Skripals.

No Novichok would explain why the local boys who joined the Skripals to feed ducks on the River Avon, taking bread from their just-contaminated hands — and even by some reports eating some of the bread — were unaffected, as were the ducks themselves.

No Novichok would explain why DS Nick Bailey, who the inquiry heard had entered Skripal's house and was exposed to poison there, experienced relatively mild symptoms — fever and hallucinations — from which he made a full physical recovery. No Novichok would explain why his colleague PC Bell, who was also exposed at the house, developed nothing more than a twitching eye, while another officer, VN005, merely experienced a numb finger.

While this may be evidence of some kind of poison, it is not convincing evidence that any of them were exposed to a weapon of mass destruction.

No Novichok would explain why Dr Stephen Cockroft would be so "gobsmacked" after Yulia Skripal woke up in hospital — and was strong enough to attempt to get out of bed — just four days after her supposed exposure to an incredibly deadly nerve agent.

No Novichok would explain why both Skripals survived an incapacitating dose of this poison, even though they were initially diagnosed and treated for something else — an opiate overdose — in the first 24 hours of their treatment, with no special precautions taken for cross-contamination by the medics treating them. None of these medics were affected.

No Novichok would explain the Skripals' rapid recovery, which the doctors treating them said they were "exceptionally surprised" by, and could not easily explain.

And no Novichok would explain why, in what might be called the proto-narrative of Novichok contamination, specialist teams in yellow hazmat suits were deployed to the London Road cemetery in a highly visible decontamination operation, only for that story to be later abandoned when it became clear the timeline of contamination was impossible.

The cemetery operation reveals the pattern of staging Hughes failed to consider. Novichok was "found" wherever the narrative required it to be found — at the cemetery (until the timeline collapsed), at the bench (despite no cross-contamination), at the pub and restaurant (despite staff handling contaminated items safely), at the door handle (despite police using it unprotected for days). And when evidence of its absence was inconvenient for the narrative, this was overlooked — the ducks that were fed, the people who gave first aid, the medical staff who treated the Skripals without barrier nursing — or even, in the case of Skripal's cat, destroyed.

When Hughes writes that "all the evidence shows" Novichok was applied to the door handle on Sunday, he is presenting the absence of evidence as the presence of proof. The absence of cross-contamination actually suggests the opposite: that there was no deadly nerve agent on the door handle, which is why everyone who came into contact with it survived.

Hughes returns to his arguments from incredulity in his final paragraph considering the possibility that the Salisbury events were staged.

f. On top of all that, there is no suggested way in which the UK authorities, if bent on staging an attack designed to look as if these two men had carried it out, could have had the remotest inkling that their designated unwitting pawns would then obligingly walk into the immediate area of the Skripals' home

The expressions of personal disbelief Hughes makes here are the phrases "no suggested way" and "remotest inkling". This is his final flourish. Even granting everything else, he says, how could UK authorities have known the two Russians would visit Christie Miller Road?

But this simply uses the circular logic Hughes has used throughout §3.123. If the two Russians were under surveillance — which Hughes conceded was a possibility, if only in order to dismiss it — then UK authorities would know in real time what the two Russians' movements were. The visits would not need to be anticipated.

The language Hughes uses here is once again opaque — he says again "there is no suggested way" in which the UK authorities could have been tracking the Russians, even though the police later produced detailed logs of their movements. This in fact suggests the UK authorities had the technical capability to follow where their "unwitting pawns" were going — but as it was not a suggestion Hughes made himself, it was not one he considered.

Once again, Hughes assumes that staging the events would involve actually putting Novichok on Skripal's door, requiring knowledge of the movements of the Russians: movements that he says could not have been anticipated. But staging could mean constructing the entire Novichok narrative post hoc, selecting which elements to emphasise and which to ignore.

We have observed Hughes taking six paragraphs to present variations of the same argument from incredulity: "I cannot imagine how UK staging could have worked, therefore it did not happen."

But arguments from incredulity are not evidence.

§3.124 I conclude that I am sure that there was no staging of the Salisbury event by the UK authorities, designed to blame Russia

Having spent six paragraphs constructing a staging hypothesis designed to be impossible and duly dismissing it as impossible, Hughes declares himself "sure" that no staging occurred.

However, as we have seen, this certainty rests on the constraints he has imposed on the circumstances of the Salisbury events as he defined them: the assertion that the UK's surveillance network could not have detected the Russians until the day before the alleged attack; the assertion that the UK authorities could not have anticipated their movements; the assertion that staging would require genuine Novichok applied in real time.

Hughes did not actually consider whether or not the events were staged. Instead he considered whether or not UK intelligence could have somehow carried out the attack he suggests the two Russians carried out: circular logic presented as judicial certainty.

Of course, if there was no Novichok in Salisbury, that would imply UK intelligence and its media operatives are capable of fabricating a story about weapons of mass destruction in order to manufacture consent for war.

It is for the reader to decide if they are capable of that.

Tim Norman (Originally published at propagandainfocus.com) Jul 20, 2026

Stalin: Interview with Harold Stassen

Coexistence, American-Soviet Cooperation, Atomic Energy, Europe

[Stalin: Interview with Harold Stassen, April 9, 1947]

Stassen: Generalissimo Stalin, on this European trip I am particularly interested in studying conditions of an economic nature. In this regard, of course, the relations of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. are very important. I realize that we have two economic systems that are very different. The U.S.S.R. with the Communist Party and with its planned economy and socialized collective state, and the United States of America with its free economy and regulated private capitalism are very different. I would be interested to know if you think these two economic systems can exist together in the same modern world in harmony with each other?

Stalin: Of course they can. The difference between them is not important so far as co-operation is concerned. The systems in Germany and the United States are the same but war broke out between them. The U.S. and U.S.S.R. systems are different but we didn't wage war against each other and the U.S.S.R. does not propose to. If during the war they could co-operate, why can't they today in peace, given the wish to co-operate? Of course, if there is no desire to co-operate, even with the same economic system they may fall out as was the case with Germany.

Stassen: I believe, of course, that they can co-operate if they both have the desire to, but there have been many statements about not being able to co-operate. Some of these were made by the Generalissimo himself before the war. But is it possible, now that the fascist axis has been defeated, that the situation has changed?

Stalin: It's not possible that I said that the two economic systems could not co-operate. Co-operation ideas were expressed by Lenin. I might have said that one system was reluctant to co-operate, but that concerned only one side. But as to the possibility of co-operation, I adhere to Lenin who expressed both the possibility and the desire of co-operation. As to the desire of the people to co-operate on the part of the U.S.S.R. and the Party, it is possible—and the two countries could only benefit by this co-operation.

Stassen: That last part is clear. The statements I referred to are those made by you at the Eighteenth Communist Party Congress in 1939 and the plenary session in 1937—statements about capitalist encirclement and monopoly. I assume from your statement now that the defeat of fascist Germany and Japan has changed that situation.

Stalin: There was not a single Party congress or plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party at which I said or could have said that co-operation between the two systems was impossible. I did say that there existed capitalist encirclement and danger of attack on the U.S.S.R. If one party does not wish to co-operate, then that means there exists a threat of attack. And actually Germany, not wishing to co-operate with the U.S.S.R., attacked the U.S.S.R. Could the U.S.S.R, have co-operated with Germany? Yes, the U.S.S.R. could have cooperated with Germany but the Germans did not wish to co-operate. Otherwise the U.S.S.R. could have co-operated with Germany as with any other country. As you see, this concerns the sphere of desire and not the possibility of co-operating. It is necessary to make a distinction between the possibility; of co-operating and the wish to co-operate. The possibility of co-operation always exists but there is not always present the wish to co-operate. If one party does not wish to co-operate, then the result will be conflict, war.

Stassen: It must be mutual.

Stalin: Yes. I want to bear testimony to the fact that Russia wants to co-operate.

Stassen: I wish to point out with reference to your earlier statement that there was a great difference between Germany and the United States at the time Germany started the war.

Stalin: There was a difference in government but no difference in the economic systems. The government was a temporary factor.

Stassen: I do not agree. Yes, there was a difference of economic systems too. Imperialism, the development of state monopoly, and the oppression of workers are the evils of capitalism practiced by the Nazis. It seems to me we have been successful in America in preventing the monopoly of capitalism and the imperialistic trend, and that the workers have made greater progress through use of the strength of their vote and their freedom than Karl Marx or Frederick Engels thought they could make—and this regulation of free capital and prevention of monopoly and freedom of workers in America makes the economic situation quite different from that which existed in Germany.

Stalin: Let us not mutually criticize our systems. Everyone has the right to follow the system he wants to maintain. Which one is better will be said by history. We should respect the systems chosen by the people, and whether the system is good or bad is the business of the American people. To co-operate, one does not need the same systems. One should respect the other system when approved by the people. Only on this basis can we secure co-operation. Only, if we criticize, it will lead us too far.

As for Marx and Engels, they were unable to foresee what would happen forty years after their death. But we should adhere to mutual respect of people. Some people call the Soviet system totalitarian. Our people call the American system monopoly capitalism. If we start calling each other names with the words monopolist and totalitarian, it will lead to no co-operation.

We must start from the historical fact that there are two systems approved by the people. Only on that basis is co-operation possible. If we distract each other with criticism, that is propaganda.

As to propaganda, I am not a propagandist but a business-like man. We should not be sectarian. When the people wish to change the systems they will do so. When we met with Roosevelt to discuss the questions of war, we did not call each other names. We established co-operation and succeeded in defeating the enemy.

Stassen: That sort of criticism has been a cause of misunderstanding after the war. Do you look forward in the future to a greater exchange of ideas and news, of students and teachers, of artists, of tourists, if there is co-operation?

Stalin: This will happen inevitably if co-operation is established. For an exchange of goods will lead to an exchange of people. . . .

Stassen: As I see it, then, you think it is possible that there will be co-operation provided there is a will and desire to co-operate.

Stalin: That is correct.

Stassen: In the development of the standards of living of the people, mechanization and electrification have been of major significance. The new development of atomic energy is of very great importance to all peoples of the world. I feel that the matter of international inspection, effective controls and outlawing the use for war of atomic energy is of supreme importance to all peoples of the world. Do you feel that there is a reasonable prospect of working out agreements for the long-term future for the peaceful development of atomic energy?

Stalin: I hope for this. There are big differences of views among us, but in the long run I hope we shall come to an understanding. International control and inspection will be established, in any view, and it will be of great importance. The peaceful use of atomic energy will bring great technological changes. It is a very great matter. As for the use of atomic energy for war purposes, this in all probability will be prohibited. It will be a problem in the long run that will be met by the consciences of the people and it will be prohibited.

Stassen: Yes, that is one of our important problems and if solved it can be a great boon—and if not, a great curse to the people of the world.

Stalin: I think we shall succeed in establishing international inspection and control. Things are leading up to it.

Stassen: I appreciate the opportunity of talking with you.

J. V. Stalin

(The interview had now lasted forty minutes and Stassen prepared to take his leave. However, Stalin indicated a willingness to continue the discussion. The remainder of the conversation dealt with prevailing economic conditions in Europe and the United States.)

Source: For Peaceful Coexistence: Post War Interviews

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Two Books By Eamon Dyas published by the Belfast Historical and Educational Society 2018

Blockading The Germans! With an overview of 19th century maritime law

The Evolution of Britain's Strategy During the First World War, Volume 1

This is the first volume of a Trilogy examining overlooked aspects of the First World War and its aftermath from a European perspective. Comprehensively sourced with scholarly research, it explains how Britain used a continental blockade to force the capitulation of the Kaiser's Germany by targeting not just military, but also civilian, imports, particularly imported food supplies, upon which Germany had become dependent since its industrial revolution.

After joining the European War of August 1914—and elevating it into a World War—Britain cast aside the two maritime codes agreed by the world's maritime powers over the previous almost 60 years — the Declaration of Paris in 1856 and the Declaration of London in 1909. In defiance of these internationally agreed codes, Britain aggressively expanded its blockade with the object of disrupting not only the legitimate trade between neutral countries and Germany but trade between neutral countries themselves.

Britain's policy of civilian starvation during the First World War was unprecedented in history. Whereas it had used the weapon of starvation against civilians in the past, in such instances this was either through the exploitation of a natural disaster to bring about famine (Ireland and India) or the result of pre-conceived policy against a non-industrial society (France during the Revolutionary Wars). Its use against Germany was the first time in history where a policy of deliberate starvation was directed against the civilian population of an advanced industrial economy.

This volume traces the evolution of Britain's relationship with international naval blockade strategies from the Crimean War through the American Civil War and the Boer War culminating in its maturity during the Great War. It also draws out how the United States—the leading neutral country—was made complicit in Blockading The Germans during the war and brings the story up to America's entry into the War.

Starving the Germans

The Evolution of Britain's Strategy During The First World War Volume 2

This is the second volume of a Trilogy that examines the manner in which the First World War was fought by Britain and its Allies against the civilians of Germany and the Central Powers and the way in which the outcome of that war distorted the prevailing trajectory of European history.

The first volume 'Blockading the Germans' explored the way in which Britain as the world's primary naval power shaped the use of the naval blockade as a weapon against civilians from the time of the Napoleonic Wars to the advent of the First World War. It also dealt with the way in which United States' actions as the main supplier of munitions and financial credits to the Allies compromised its neutrality and made the British pursuit of that war possible. This current volume begins at the point when the United States formally joined the war in April 1917. It shows how, through the use of food embargoes on the northern neutral countries, the United States completed Britain's food strangulation of Germany and brought misery and death to the civilian populations of those countries in the process.

It explains the way in which the terms of the November 1918 Armistice were arbitrarily expanded by the Allies to ensure that Germany was made malleable to the British demand that it accept total responsibility for the war and at the same time hampered its chances of a post-war recovery.

Arthur Bryant — The Unfinished Victory

CHAPTER 5

Rise of the Men of Iron

What Hitler was out to run was a revolution. He was not, as some of his would-be allies made the mistake of supposing at the time, preaching a reactionary creed. He was not in the least inclined to reaction and little interested in the things reaction seeks. On the contrary he meant to smash the prevailing order of society because he held it no longer existed in order to serve men but merely to make men serve the class interests of the few. ''The fundamental principle'', he wrote, "is that the State is not an end in itself but the means to an end."

For the bourgeois in possession, Hitler had the greatest contempt.

National Socialism was not, however, so much a revolution against the existing ruling class as against a corrupt social system. It was puritan rather than personal. It is this that accounts for its cruelty and inhumanity. Measured in terms of human destruction, the German Revolution was a trifling affair compared with the French Revolution and the Russian. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who were forced to slay millions of their internal foes before they triumphed, the Nazis did comparatively little killing in their own country. They had no need to, for they were appealing to instincts which nine out of ten Germans shared at heart. They had not to slay the bulk of their opponents, for with the Foreigner and the Slump as recruiting sergeants they were able to convert them.

Yet to the small minority against whom the popular instincts to which they appealed were directed, they were ruthless and inhuman in their unappeasable hatred. They destroyed because they were shocked, much as Cromwell's troopers slew the trollops in King Charles's baggage lines or the Papists at Drogheda. In their megalomania they regarded Jews not as human beings but as purveyors of moral pestilence, who, with cynical commercialisation of the healthy progenitive instincts on which the future of the race depended, infected the nation with spiritual disease worse than the Black Death…

He never stopped to consider what elemental forces of sadism he might be loosing on the world by his blind appeal to hatred. Nor did he remember that those whom he reviled as unclean beasts were human beings like himself, subject to ''the same dimensions, senses, affections, passions, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is.''

But the National Socialists were rebels against a system of government that they believed to be destroying the national character and the future well-being of the race. Human rights, Hitler proclaimed, were above State rights: if rebellion was necessary to save a people from moral and spiritual decay, rebellion was justified. It was more: it was a duty. The defeat which Germany had suffered in 1918 was by itself nothing — for it could be repaired — compared with the moral rot which had been its cause and which was growing worse with every year. The whole system was rotten — commerce, education, democracy — for it was turning out men and women without willpower and the spirit of self-sacrifice. The rot had got to be stopped. It was Hitler's conviction, and one that he succeeded in conveying to his countrymen, that he was the man to stop it…

As for those who openly opposed him there was no bottom to the lake of pitch assigned to them. The slums of Vienna and the trenches of Flanders had given this outspoken child of Austrian peasants a more than Marxist vocabulary, and when he met his enemies in the gate, he did not restrain it. Instead, he laid about him with a rude Cromwellian vigour that delighted those who shared his views. Hatred and vilification became the hallmark of his Movement — so much so that refined and peaceable onlookers often forgot that it had ever stood for anything else.

But it was not only temperament — the effect of bitter and prolonged suffering on an ultra-sensitive but inherently tough nature —that made Hitler ruthless. It was part of a logical and thought-out design. In the circumstances of the time and with such overwhelming odds against him, his crusade could never have achieved victory in any other way. He had to overcome gigantic physical forces of intolerance and inertia. He could not do so without a sword. He forged his Party as one.

For people who believed that victory could be won by talk alone, for those who thought that the reason which sways university debating societies and common rooms could intimidate Communist cudgels and revolvers, for those who put their faith in vague intellectual or international generalities, the Leader of the New German Faith had no use. He was out to run a Revolution… In this Hitler, the house painter, like Bismarck, the Junker squire, showed a grasp of the realities of statesmanship…

Hitler confronted the disciplined, simple and ruthless international ideal of Marxism with an ideal equally disciplined, simple and ruthless. A few elementary ideas, generalised, without distinction or subtlety, were all the ordinary man could understand. As without the ordinary man there could be no hope of victory, first things, however repugnant to cultured and refined people, had to come first.

And if the creed which was to win the masses needed the simplicity of the Marxist dogma, it needed also the same rigid intolerance and insistence on undeviating orthodoxy. In Hitler's eyes it was all very well for people who lived under an ancient dispensation to complain that power was being stated in its basest and most elementary forms. In a long established and unbroken society such as that of England, it was no longer necessary to work the masses into a frenzy of crude enthusiasm to achieve political expression for a new idea. The unquestioning submission of the individual to the authority of the community without which no State can subsist was maintained there, even in a democratic age, by a kind of unbroken custom and prescription: rank, wealth and even gentleness of conduct still received a respect which might strike the theorist of the study as servile, but which in practice alone enables a complex and free society to exist. Such a society had been evolved by centuries of custom:

only because its order had become second nature, could it dispense with intolerance without falling into anarchy.

To restore Germany's vital order — the very life-blood of a community — intolerance was an indispensable preliminary. Unlike that of England, German society had been shattered and destroyed by the war and the disasters that followed. It could not be put together again without a rigid cement…

A fighting movement of flawless discipline and animated by the same unquestioning devotion to 1ts faith and leaders as the old Prussian Guard, was the instrument Hitler set out to create. It must place him among the great organisers of mankind that he was able to establish it so quickly. In 1919 it consisted of half a dozen men debating round a tavern table by candlelight; in 1933 it dominated Germany; by 1938 it was one of the most formidable forces in the world.

Hitler's achievement was due to a wonderful and largely instinctive knowledge of his countrymen and to his own clear perception of the precise means essential to success. His racial theory may be repulsive gibberish, his ambitions barbarous and ridiculous, his motives cruel and sadistic, but only a man deliberately shutting his eyes to realities can deny his astonishing genius for leadership. With Lenin, Hitler was the answer the gods gave to the Marxist contention that events in this world are shaped solely by materialist circumstance and that men are helpless puppets in the hands of inevitable powers they cannot control. Cromwell was such an answer to the study theories of Calvin and Napoleon to those of Rousseau. It was the same terrible answer that God made to Job out of the whirlwind…

It was not only in the use of violence that Hitler copied and improved on Marxist methods. He stole their pageantry as well. Watching the sea of red flags, armlets and flowers at a Communist rally in the Berlin Lustgarten after the war, Hitler had learnt how the hypnotic influence of sound and colour could be turned to a political end. He organised the meetings of his own Party as though they were titanic theatrical performances, with forests of banners, clash of drums and martial music, exciting and elaborate ritual and, most grateful of all to the German soul, a wealth of uniforms. Like the Catholic Church, Hitler's Movement made its appeal not only to the minds of the masses but to their aesthetic feelings and love of drama. Amid the drab bleakness of post-war commercial and republican Germany, the meetings of the National Socialist crusade offered to the man in the street the only colour and warmth and light he was likely to find.

To the dispossessed millions it offered something even more attractive — status and responsibility. The National Socialist Movement was organised in a way unknown to the "democratic" Parties…

For a time progress was slow. During the years between Hitler's release at the end of 1924 and the Great Slump in 1929 certain sections of the German nation enjoyed a period of hectic but false commercial prosperity, paid for by the loans of British and American financiers, For the first time since 1916 the bulk of the German people were not hungry. Politically it was the era of Stresemann, Locarno and Reparation payments. The material incentives to enrol under Hitler's standard were still small, the political advantages far from certain. In 1925 there were only 27,000 members, in the following year 49,000. Even as late as 1928 they did not exceed 100,000. In that year the Party polled 809,541 votes in a General Election and secured I2 seats in the Reichstag. Hitler himself was not allowed to stand on account of his technical lack of citizenship.

Yet all the while his apocalyptic teaching was finding its way into the hearts of two great classes of his countrymen. It appealed to youth and it appealed to those who had lost their all in the Inflation. To neither of these disinherited classes did the democratic-capitalist System offer any hope…

And the dispossessed—the lonely and dispirited men and women who had seen their homes, their savings and their livelihood sacrificed to the Jewish speculator when the currency collapsed — turned also to the new creed…

To millions the National Socialist crusade came to provide the one interest in a life of lonely and drab poverty. It gave them colour and glamour, hope for the future, and above all, the delight of companionship with others who shared their beliefs. The starved herd instincts of the middle class were suddenly released. The prolonged, losing battle of solitary respectability for appearances no longer mattered. They felt they had found something better. To many the Movement became the very bread of life. Hunger, cold, the aching remembrance of a happier past were all forgotten. To those in dire trouble — and in those years millions of Germans were — nothing can be so heartening as the cheerful society of comrades in misfortune…

Hitler turned the great and divided mass of post-war Germany's aggrieved and disgruntled into an enthusiastic and disciplined army of good companions. That they were one day to become cruel masters and bad neighbours to others does not diminish the magnitude of his service to his own countrymen at the time. On a larger scale it was not incomparable to that which General Booth performed for the down-and-outs of industrial Britain. It explains their subsequent devotion and gratitude to the iron regimen of the revolutionary dictatorship…

After the World Slump set in the autumn of 1929, the Nazis began to recruit in growing numbers from the working masses… Everything that Hitler had repeated so often against the capitalist system was now seen by the working man to be true. He stood before them in their hour of darkest suffering as a kind of Robin Hood, who also was ready to mulct their rich oppressors to give them bread and justice.

To the six million unemployed proletarians he promised labour, decent conditions and a stake in the country at the expense of the international financier who first exploited and then neglected them. To the peasant he promised the freedom of his land, now mortgaged to the Jewish usurer; to the small shopkeeper and trader, a fair chance against the cut-throat competition of the big trusts and multiple stores.

This ordinary German seemed to understand the troubles of all Germany and to be eager to take them on his own broad shoulders.

The allegiance he won in these years of suffering cannot be measured in mere numbers…

Though still resolved to avoid any too violent measures that might risk drowning the young Revolution in a sea of blood, the Nazi leaders, as they felt the surge of renascent youth which they themselves had aroused, became increasingly bellicose and intransigent. Theirs was the pirates' adage — we must advance or be undone…

Compromise was impossible: twice in 1932 Hitler, at the head of the largest parliamentary Party in the State, refused to take office as Vice-President without complete power to carry out his revolutionary plans, The aim of the Nazis was not Ministerial posts and salaries for their own sake but the means to create a revolutionary civilisation and society. To achieve that end, every means was justifiable in their stern, eager, humourless eyes — cruelty, intolerance, even the grossest injustice…

On January 30th, 1933, the awaited day came. After every expedient had been tried by the democratic politicians and the old ruling class to keep him out, Hitler, long the leader of the largest Party in the State, was invited by President Hindenburg to form a Government.

The National Socialists had beaten the parliamentarians at their own game. A new one was now to begin. All night long the endless torchlight processions filed past the aged soldier President and the new Chancellor of the Reich standing

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Casement Life and Times

Angus Mitchell

At the time of his execution for treason in 1916, few were aware who Roger Casement was or what he represented. Since then, he has been lauded for his investigations into Belgian brutality in the Congo Free State and human rights abuses in the Peruvian rubber industry, but much else about him has remained obscured behind speculation about his sexuality and secret Irish revolutionary activity while in service of the British Empire.

As such, his place in history has been ill-defined and multifarious: his involvement in the waging of war followed by the delicate negotiation of peace; his republicanism perceived variously as an eccentric enthusiasm and as a threat to the British Empire; his contemporary legacy overshadowed by the 'Black Diaries' of disputed legitimacy, detailing alleged liaisons with young men.

In Casement, Angus Mitchell illuminates a life shrouded in mystery, which operated in the conflicting spheres of British foreign diplomacy and Irish revolutionary activity. Considering Casement's rebellious nature, Mitchell asks if it was motivated as much by his 'incorrigible' Irishness as by his exposure of the appalling crimes against humanity that he witnessed in Africa and South America. Most significantly, Casement demonstrates that his legacy cannot be ascribed to just one cause, whether as a critic of global colonialism or as a founding father of the modern Irish nation-state; Casement's true commitment was to a universal understanding based on humanity, tolerance, and justice.

Roger Casement publications

from Athol Books:

Six Days Of The Irish Republic (eyewitness account of 1916), by L.G. Redmond-Howard. Contains a profile of Roger Casement, written during his trial; the Irish Case for the League of Nations; and a play written jointly with Harry Carson (the Ulster leader's son). Intro. by Brendan Clifford. Index. 256pp ISBN 1 903497 27 2. AHS, March 2006. €21, £17.50

Roger Casement: **The Crime Against Europe**. With The Crime Against Ireland. Introduction by B. Clifford. 184pp. Index. ISBN 0 85034 101 9. AB, 2003. €18, £15

Roger Casement: A Reassessment Of The Diaries Controversies by Mairead Wilson.ISBN 0 85034 112 4. 32pp, AB. October 2005. €6, £5

The Casement Diary Dogmatists. by Brendan Clifford. 68pp. ABM No 22. ISBN 1 874157 09 X. October 2004. €8, £6

Traitor-Patriots In The Great War: Casement & Masaryk by Brendan Clifford. 56pp. ABM No 23. ISBN 1 874157 10 3. October 2004. €6, £5

Casement, Alsace-Lorraine And The Great Irredentist War by Brendan Clifford. With extracts from Casement's Crime Against Europe, and works by Rene Bazin, Coleman Phillipson and Nicholas Mansergh. ISBN 1 874 157 17 0. 48pp. A Belfast Magazine No. 30, Oct. 06. €6, £5

A Very Political Project: Charles Haughey, Social Partnership, and Ireland's 1990s Economic Transformation: A History,

by Philip O'Connor

395 pp., including sources, footnotes, bibliography and index.

Ireland: €26 on howthfreepress.com + €5 post.

Also available on amazon.co.uk and amazon.com (Search "a very political project").

Following years of research in many archives, including those of the Department of the Taoiseach, the NESC, the NAI and the trade union movement, and interviews with many of the key players, this book will appear on 1st September. It provides a radical re-assessment of the Haughey era focused on Haughey's singular socio-economic strategy and how it was implemented successfully from 1987 after previous attempts in the late 1960s and early 1980s. It was that strategy, and not benign domestic or external factors as often claimed, that transformed Ireland economically.

For further information on the book see howthfreepress.com.

The book substantially builds on a PhD awarded by Dublin City University in 2021, though with much added material, not least from Haughey's own papers, and shorn of the thesis's purely academic aspects.

The book will be launched on 1st September by Mr Dermot McCarthy, former Sec. Gen. of the Dept. of the Taoiseach, at 6pm in Doheny & Nesbitt's, Dublin, and on 2nd September by former Taoiseach Mr Bertie Ahern at 7pm in The Abbey Tavern, Howth. To attend either (or both!) of these events, register at https://howthfreepress.com/haughey or by emailing howthfreepress@gmail.com ... or simply turn up!

[According to early reports, both events were a huge success, packed out and well staged, with hundreds of books sold.]

Endorsements for

A Very Political Project

Prof. Gary Murphy, DCU, author of Haughey (Gill 2021):

"Very likely to be the definitive work on the subject... It will in time take its place as a masterpiece of modern Irish scholarship."

The late Dr Martin Mansergh, diplomat, historian, public representative and Special Adviser to Taoisigh Haughey, Reynolds and Ahern:

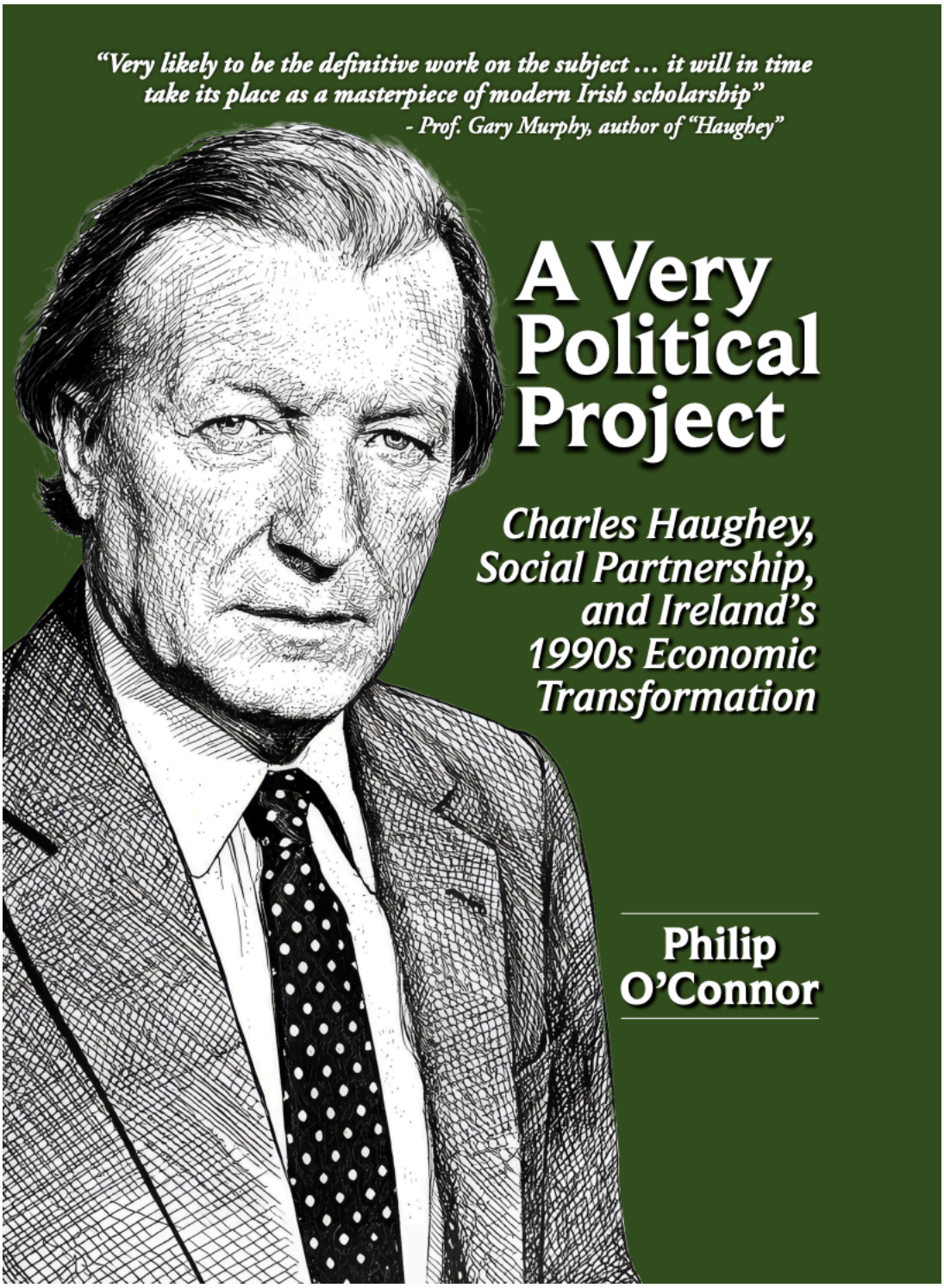
"This book … undertakes the much-needed task of examining the archives on social partnership in great detail … It is the first to enter into the detail of its negotiation and its mechanisms. ... It draws not only on the recollection of participants but on many archives, particularly those of the Department of the Taoiseach, the NESC and the trade union movement. Social partnership ... represented an important alternative to and modification of the dominant free market and anti-statist approach that characterized the era of Thatcher and Reagan ..., which left its imprint for a long time afterwards.

O'Connor's book highlights the value to a country of serious professional political leadership and the determining role of Charles Haughey as Taoiseach between 1979 and 1992."

About Philip O'Connor

The author, Philip O'Connor, is an historian who has worked in the private and public sectors, as a translator, in education at university level, in politics and in employment, training and social policy. He has written various historical articles and books on Irish, German and other topics.

See https://www.linkedin.com/in/philip-o-connor-b5b9944/



A Very Political Project
Charles Haughey, Social Partnership and Ireland's 1990s Economic Transformation
A new book by Philip O'Connor