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[00:10] The Main News: Russia tells 23 British diplomats they have to leave...

[00:37] The Prime Minister Theresa May says the government is considering its next move after Russia expelled 23 British diplomats. Moscow's decision was in response to the UK saying the same number of Russian officials must leave following the nerve agent attack on a former spy in Salisbury.

Here's the Shadow Foreign Secretary [Emily Thornberry](#):

I'm pleased that the government have now asked for the international community to verify this chemical attack so that there is clear evidence that it was Russia. At the moment it's a *prima facie* case that it is, and the government is right to condemn them, and the government is right to take the action that the government has.

Police in Salisbury are renewing their appeal for any witnesses who may have seen Sergei Skripal's burgundy BMW before he was found unconscious with his daughter Yulia. The pair are still critically ill in hospital, and our reporter Tom Burrige is following investigations in the city:

They're particularly interested in the car. We've seen a lot of work on the car by officers in specialist suits over the last few days, and we saw the car being towed late yesterday. What's new is that they want to hear from anyone who might have seen the car earlier in the day – at around about 9:15, on three main roads.

[06:00] With Steven Nolan [SN]

[06:30] We're starting tonight with a roll [??] over the Salisbury nerve agent attack, 'cos former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia remain critically ill in hospital. The debate over who was responsible, and the consequences of the attack, is raging. Russia is to expel 23 British diplomats. Their Foreign Ministry says UK staff will be expelled from Moscow within a week in response to Britain's decision to expel 23 Russian diplomats. It also says it will close the British Consulate in Russia, which promotes cultural ties between the nations, and the British Consulate in St Petersburg.

The UK government says, ah, they were poisoned with a nerve agent "of a type developed by Russia" called Novichok. The Russian government denies any involvement in the attack. Prime Minister Theresa May has been speaking about this today:

In light of their previous behavior, we anticipated a response of this kind, and we will consider our next steps in the coming days, alongside our allies and partners. But Russia's response doesn't change the facts of the matter. They attempted assassination of two people on British soil, for which there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian state was culpable. It is Russia that is in flagrant breach of international law and the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#).

I repeat today that we have no disagreement with the Russian people. Many Russians have made this country their home, and those who abide by our laws and make a contribution to our society will always be welcome. But we will never tolerate a threat to the life of British citizens, and others, on British soil from the Russian government.

While Russia is not at all disputing Britain's claim that the Kremlin is most likely to blame for this, I speak to [Craig Murray](#) [CM], who's a former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan

[08:40] Craig, good evening.

CM: Good evening.

SN: Good evening. So why are you not convinced Russia is behind this?

CM: We've clearly not seen enough evidence to come to a definite conclusion, and because Theresa May, as you just said, is obviously milking it for all it's worth, trying to sound as Churchillian as possible, and to, you know, distract attention from the obvious state of the government in general.

When you see politicians jumping on a bandwagon, trying to become popular, getting well ahead of the evidence, then you have to be very skeptical.

SN: But why would the British government respond in this way if they weren't certain?

CM: Because, as you just heard: it's popular, they play it to advantage, and it fits in well with their current diplomatic stance against Russia anyway.

You have to listen very carefully to what they said. A phrase which you've repeated and they've used, that this is a weapon "of a **type** developed by Russia."

They said that in parliament, they said it in the UN Security Council, and they said it in the [Joint Statement](#) by [Britain, France, US, and Merkel]. All those used the exact words: "of a **type** developed by Russia."

And that's true. You know I've got some vodka here, of a type developed by Russia, but it was made in Warrington. The OPCW (the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons](#)) has always been of a view that there is no [definitive?] evidence that the Russians actually succeeded in synthesizing the Novichoks.

Novichoks were successfully synthesized in 2016 by Iran, in a controlled programme with OPCW supervision, and reported by the OPCW, and if Iran can synthesize them, then so can many other countries, including the UK, including the US, including Israel, and quite possible including a number of, you know, a states who might not be too careful of their security and what happens to them.

Also, we have to consider that there may be countries who had the motive in “setting up” Russia, and trying to damage Putin just as he gets re-elected, and perhaps trying to damage Russia’s international reputation in response to the role Russia has played in Syria.

So to say “this has to be Russia” is a nonsense. And what’s particularly pernicious is that they are trying to develop that by attempting to imply only Russia has this weapon – which is completely and utterly untrue. And the reason that they always have to use the same phrase: “of a **type** developed by Russia” is the scientists at Porton Down refused to sign up to any stronger phrase, and there were very fierce Whitehall battles with the government trying to get them to say it was a Russian agent, and they wouldn’t, because it isn’t. They .. Well there’s no evidence of where it came from and who made it.

SN: The [NATO ??] General has told the BBC just yesterday that the Alliance had “no reason” to doubt the findings and assessments of the British government.

CM: Well of course. NATO is controlled by its member states, and France and Germany and Britain and America have made a political decision to go with this line. That’s not evidence. That’s politicians talking. And when they say: “of a **type** developed by Russia” that shows they haven’t said it’s made in Russia, they haven’t said it’s produced in Russia, they haven’t said it’s manufactured in Russia.

And no journalist at the BBC has said “Why do you keep saying ‘of a **type** produced by Russia’? Are you saying this is made in Russia?” No journalist at the BBC has asked the Minister, because the BBC is a puppet of state propaganda as well.

SN: Well, obviously I would reject that as one of the people who work for the BBC, and that’s just simply not true.

CM: Have you asked anyone from the government whether this is actually made, produced, or manufactured in ...

SN: Well I haven’t had an interview with the Minister in the government, but if I did, I would. And you’re on the BBC tonight giving a counterinterview, so I don’t think there’s any point going down this red herring of that we are some type of state sponsored voice for the British government because that is palpably nonsense.

If it’s not Russia, who would it be Craig?

CM: Well as I said, there are a number of possible alternatives. One of them is it's a non-state actor. It could be a Russian non-state actor. Obviously Mr Skripal sold the names of Russian agents to the [UA ??] for money. We don't know the circumstances. Some of those agents could have been operating in conflict theatres, you know. People could have died because of this. So obviously he would have a great many enemies, not merely the Russian state itself.

But also, as I say, it could be another state, wishing to pin the blame on Russia, particularly with regard to Russia's role in Syria. Could be ... it's a good time to undermine Russia, at a time when Putin appears to have played his hand very well and been, if you like, on the winning side of the Syrian conflict. And that brings in a great many states who have the motive to do Russia down.

SN: You mentioned Israel earlier on. We contacted the Israeli embassy. They said that any claims that Israel is involved in the attack in Salisbury are preposterous and ridiculous.

CM: Well no more preposterous and ridiculous than Russia. Israel has chemical weapons. Unlike Russia, Israel has never signed the Chemical Weapons Convention. Israel refuses to declare its chemical weapon stocks to the OPCW. It should be said Russia is a member, has signed the Convention. And 40,000 tons of Russian chemical weapons have been destroyed by the OPCW in a programme under OPCW supervision which finished last year. If it's preposterous that Israel might do it, why is Israel one of a tiny handful of countries – including North Korea – which refuses to sign, or to ratify, the Chemical Weapons Convention. It's not preposterous – it's a possibility. I can by no means say "Israel did it" but it's not impossible.

It's not impossible quite a number of people did it. But jumping to the conclusion "it can **only** be Russia" is simply wrong when there's simply been no evidence presented to make that clear.

SN: Stay there for us Craig.

[Professor Ivor Gaber](#) [IG] is a Professor of Political Journalism at the University of Sussex, and was involved with [Alexander Litvinenko](#) when he came to the UK.

Good evening to you Ivor.

IG: Good evening.

SN: Hi. Do you think Russia is responsible here?

IG: Oh, I have absolutely no idea. I have no knowledge of it specifically. I mean it looks ... on the balance of possibilities, I would even say probabilities, but that's not what I know. All I can talk about was my experience with one ex-[FSB](#) agent and the insight he gave me into London has become, at the invitation virtually of both governments, the centre of a very

shady mixture of oligarchs, of spies, of mafiosi. The mafia wasn't entirely fictional and it's not surprising that we see this spate of deaths, unexplained deaths of this class of people who we have welcomed in.

SN: [Technical issues re sound quality.]

SN: How does Russia operate – its politicians, its big business?

IG: I'm going to be one of those embarrassing interviewees who's going to say that wasn't my expertise, that wasn't what I was writing about. I had a piece in the [Independent](#) today. I was writing about my personal experience with Litvinenko and with [Boris Berezovsky](#), and the insights that gave me into how this sort of swamp of Russian oligarchs, of spies, of gangsters, operate in London, and why I'm not surprised we've had all these unexplained deaths and why ...

SN: So how do they operate in London? Give me an insight into that then.

IG: Well ... The insight that I can offer you is the way that Litvinenko explained it to me in terms of ... how shall I put it, [c??] is the wrong word, that many of these oligarchs and people working ... espionage agents, and [Chechen separatists](#), and other political activists, and gangsters all know each other, they all have fairly affluent lifestyles, eating in the same restaurants, living in the same areas, know each other, and business is done and sometimes that business turns bloody. There is very close links one can see between people close to Putin and business oligarchs, some of whom settled here, and they fall out with Putin and sometimes meet an unfortunate end. It happened in the case of the one I dealt with – Mr Berezovsky.

CN: So Putin has the undisputed power, does he, if he wants to, to order the death of anybody? Is that what you're saying?

IG: No, I'm not saying. I would not, I'm not sure, I could not see any advantage to Putin ordering the death of the MI6 agent in Salisbury. I can't see any immediate reason why he'd do that, but I could see that these people dabble in politics, they dabble in big business, and they get their fingers burned. And there might well be people close to Putin who felt he was an embarrassment and [??] get rid of him. But let me specify I do not know, and make no claim to know. I just had some passing acquaintanceship with that world, and I'm not surprised that we've had all these unexplained deaths.

SN: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Craig Murray, have said to us tonight "We've no idea what Mr Murray is referring to. The Prime Minister told MPs in Parliament on Monday that world leading experts at Porton Down had positively identified this chemical agent and it is clear that it is a military grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia. None of that is in any doubt."

You've already covered that Craig, and you're zooming in on the fact that they're saying "developed by Russia." They are unable to say whether it's ... well they're **not** saying whether it was actually manufactured in Russia, or the source of it was from Russia. Right?

CM: Right. No one doubts that Russia had the idea of making these things first, and worked on developing them. It has always been doubted until now that they really succeeded. The Iranians succeeded under OPCW supervision some time ago, and chemical formulae were published to the whole world 20 years ago. So, many states could have done it. The "of a type developed by Russia" thing means nothing. Undoubtedly.

I should say – and I agree with the good professor – and I think that Russia could have done this. Putin probably does have the power to do this, if he wanted to. And I think Russia definitely is a suspect. But that's far from the same thing as saying "Russia did it."

SN: Okay. Craig Murray and Professor Ivor Gaber, thank you very much indeed.

[21:11]