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**The Skripal Poisoning on Twitter:
A Visual Content Analysis of Russian Disinformation
from the Russian Embassy in London**

Master's thesis

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Study programme: IMESS

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Year of the defence: 2020

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
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In Prague on: 29.07.2020

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References

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Abstract

This paper explores the visual content of the Russian Embassy in London in connection to the Skripal poisoning in Salisbury, UK on March 4, 2018. Considering the Skripal poisoning as a significant event in the relationship between the UK and Russia, that Russian disinformation increases substantially surrounding events perceived as key to security, and that the Russian Embassy in London is increasingly coming under investigation for controversial content, the aim of this paper is to deconstruct the tweets made by the Russian Embassy in London using the Skripal poisoning as a case study. This paper also situates this event within the broader context of Russian strategic narratives and disinformation. Tweets made by the Russian Embassy in London were collected between March 4th and Sept. 28th, 2018 and categorized visually into representations of actors, events, and message. Bleiker's (2015) visual content analysis framework was used, specifically through compositional, semiotic and discursive analyses. Through this deconstruction of visual conflict framing, it is hoped that a better understanding of the building blocks of Russian state disinformation can be ascertained within the UK domestic media environment.

Abstrakt

Tento článek zkoumá tweetové vizuálizace vytvářené ruským velvyslanectvím v Londýně v souvislosti s otravou Skripalem v Salisbury ve Velké Británii dne 4. března 2018. Otravu Skripalem lze považovat za významnou událost ve vztahu mezi Velkou Británií a Ruskem, jelikož míra ruská dezinformace se výrazně zvýšila v případě souvisejících událostí vnímaných jako klíčových z hlediska bezpečnosti, čímž se ruské velvyslanectví v Londýně stále více dostávalo do sporu ohledně těchto kontroverzních obsahů. Cílem tohoto příspěvku je proto dekonstruovat tweety produkované ruským velvyslanectvím v Londýně ohledně otravy Skripalem, a to formou případové studie, která uvede událost do širšího kontextu ruských strategických narativů a dezinformací. Tweety ruského velvyslanectví v Londýně byly shromážděny za období od 4. do 28. září 2018 a vizuálně rozděleny do reprezentací aktérů, událostí a médií. Jako koncept byl použit Bleikerův (2015) rámec pro vizuální analýzu obsahu, konkrétně prostřednictvím dílčích kompozičních, sémiotických a diskurzivních analýz. Tato dekonstrukce vizuálních konfliktních rámců vytvoří pro domácí

britské mediální prostředí možnost lepšího pochopení základních stavebních kamenů ruské, státem organizované dezinformace.

Keywords

Russian Disinformation, Skripal Poisoning, Twitter, Visual Content Analysis

Klíčová slova

Ruská dezinformace, otrava Skripalem, Twitter, analýza vizuálního obsahu

Title

The Skripal Poisoning on Twitter: A Visual Content Analysis of Russian Disinformation from the Russian Embassy in London

Název práce

Otrava Skripalem na Twitteru: Analýza vizuálního obsahu ruské dezinformace z ruského velvyslanectví v Londýně

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1.0 Introduction

On March 4th, 2018 former Russian Spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter were found in Salisbury, UK, foaming at the mouth as a result of exposure to Novichok, a lethal nerve agent first developed by Russia in the 1970s (Brunning, 2018). This attack on British soil was quickly attributed to the Russian state, and what followed was a rapid escalation of diplomatic tensions, accusations, and threats between the British and Russian governments. While this event marked a turn in Russo-British relations, it also initiated a massive Russian-led disinformation campaign which aimed to control the information space and undermine the British government's narratives, confuse and mislead the public, and potentially sway public opinion (Wilson, 2011). Often under looked, this disinformation campaign was also prominent on diplomatic social media accounts. In the current technologically diverse context, diplomatic missions are increasingly online, meaning foreign governments can easily bypass traditional media to project favourable narratives and frame events in a particular way for international audiences. This signals a significant shift in diplomacy, as largely unregulated content reaches wider audiences and thus represents a key vulnerability in a government's ability to control domestic perceptions of political and military conflicts.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the Skripal poisoning was framed visually and textually by deconstructing the images and texts used in Russian tweets found on the Russian Embassy of London's Twitter account. The framing of the attack, specifically between March 4th and Sept. 28th, 2018, is the focus here as it was a politically significant event in Russo-British relations. Additionally, this timeframe provides a useful academic context as a case study to analyze the disinformation campaign's structural elements. It is clear that Russian strategic narratives and disinformation are not easily categorized, nor are they designed to be so. However, through deconstructing the content of the visuals and co-text alongside the tweets, this paper aims to draw attention to a blind spot in the debate surrounding Russian diplomatic disinformation on social media, contribute to the growing body of research on the visual construction of political events, and better understand the building blocks of Russian state disinformation in the UK domestic media environment. Chapter 2 of this paper provides a background on the Skripal attacks and the role of the Russian Embassy on Twitter, which was selected as the case study for this analysis due to

its saliency in the political, social, and media relationship in the Russo-British context. As Twitter is an inherently visual platform (Glynn, 2013), no analysis of the Embassy's event framing could discount the impact of visual content, and therefore, ways politics can be visualized and framed are also discussed. Chapter 3 serves to situate this case study in the broader context of disinformation and strategic narratives and highlights four key strategic narratives pertinent to this analysis. Chapter 4 poses two research questions, discusses the subjective decisions made during the data collection, and outlines the categorization stages of the visual analysis. Chapter 5 provides the analysis of the data using visual and textual analysis tools while Chapter 6 reviews the research questions and discusses salient features identified in the analysis referring back to strategic narratives and disinformation. Finally, this paper concludes with a review of the aims and outcomes.

2.0 Literature Review

This section aims to identify a gap in the visual analysis of online diplomacy which this paper intends to contribute to, specifically through a visual content analysis of the Skripal poisoning on the Russian Embassy in London's (henceforth Rusemb-London) Twitter account. Therefore, the significance of the Skripal attack is first presented, followed by a discussion on the increasingly popular and controversial Twitter account of the Rusemb-London, which also highlights the changing role of diplomacy on social media. Finally, as Twitter is a visual platform, visual content analysis tools and methods are presented which will be applied in this paper.

2.1 Skripal in Context

Despite generally increasing tensions connected to a variety of international conflicts, few events have provoked such clear and concise action between Russia and the UK as the 2018 Skripal poisoning. The Novichok attack in Salisbury marked a substantial shift in the relationship between the UK and Russia which exposed underlying tensions between these nations, initiated large disinformation campaigns, and prompted changes in foreign policy that had economic and political ramifications (Stewart, Walker and Borger, 2018; Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019).

Although significant, the Skripal poisoning was not the first high profile political poisoning on British soil. As a result of the radioactive polonium 210 poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006, there had been a suspension of "...official contact with Russia's security service...", as concerns over Russian involvement in the assassination were raised (Allan, 2018: 3). Despite this, bilateral economic cooperation was sheltered from the "increasingly problematic political relationship" and protecting economic relations was prioritized (Allan, 2018: 4; Blake et. al, 2017). In fact, the drive for a public inquiry into the assassination was primarily led by Litvinenko's widow rather than the British Government, and was only initiated ten years after the murder, having been previously rejected under unclear security grounds (Duncan, 2018). The public inquiry did conclude that FSB agents were responsible for the poisoning of Litvinenko, Britain charged two agents with murder in absentia, and while the refusal of the Russian

government to extradite these agents did “trigger an all-out diplomatic crisis with Russia” (Blake et. al, 2017) the British rhetoric was unmatched by action (Allan, 2018).

The Litvinenko murder highlighted that British economic and political interests could subvert repercussions to Russian state attacks in the UK. However, this incident was also not unique. Investigative journalists have recently identified fourteen additional suspicious deaths of Russian nationals on British soil which had previously been dismissed by the police as either suicides or cardiac arrests (Blake et. al, 2017). Despite knowledge that the Russian state “is expert at using poisons that kill without a trace – particularly by triggering cardiac arrest,” a 2006 change in Russian law had been passed permitting “extra-judicial killings abroad” in certain circumstances, and US intelligence connecting the Russian state to these suspicious deaths, the British government seemed unconcerned (Blake et. al, 2017; Eke, 2006). Murder on British soil was thus, to some extent, preferable to confrontation and consequently acceptable in certain circumstances. There are multiple reasons for British inaction towards the Russian state which include fear of retaliation, internal incompetence, and a desire to preserve economic connections (Blake et. al, 2017). However, it was also identified that due to few tangible repercussions, the Russian state was making “increasingly ‘bold moves’ in the UK without fear of reprisals” (Blake et. al, 2017).

The 2018 attack in Salisbury potentially represents the realization of these “increasingly bold moves,” as some (Barry, 2018) argue this was designed to attract attention in order to send a message to former Russian operatives currently in asylum abroad. Yet, it also marked a clear contrast in the British Government’s reaction. In comparison to the previous attacks, the response to the Skripal poisonings was fundamentally different and saw then-Prime Minister Theresa May publicly stating “...that it was ‘highly likely’ that Russia was responsible...” and threatening the suspension of bilateral contracts, asset freezes, legal action and even social event boycotts (Allan, 2018: 7; BBC, 2018).

Despite the fact that the British Porton Down defense research laboratory (DTSL) had observed that the “military-grade Novichok nerve agent could probably be deployed only by a nation state” (Morris and Crerar, 2018), the British Government still attempted to downplay the event by allowing for the possibility that Novichok had simply fallen into the hands of non-state actors (Allan, 2018: 7). Had the Russian state partially cooperated and played along with the idea that someone external had used the chemical weapon, political

and economic action may have been somewhat avoided. Instead, the Russian Government failed to cooperate with requests for “‘full and complete’ disclosure of its Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)...” (Allan, 2018: 7) and responded to British accusations with “sarcasm, contempt and defiance” (Stewart, Walker and Borger, 2018). Consequently, 23 individuals from the Rusemb-London were made persona non grata in the UK, and to show solidarity with Britain, 27 other countries expelled a total of 123 Russian spies and diplomats (Galeotti, 2019).

The shift in British reactions to the Skripal attack should be understood against other events which compounded perceptions of Russian state meddling and perhaps demonstrated the final straw of Russian appeasement. First, accusations of chemical weapon use in Syria by the Russian-backed regime were suspected and believed to have contributed to an increasing humanitarian crisis (hrw.org, 2013). Secondly, the continuing conflict in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, and the ongoing war in the Donbass were amplified by cyber attacks and ransomware which not only led to the loss of lives but also “hundreds of millions of pounds of damage to companies around the world, including here in the UK” (MacAskill, 2018). Finally, there was the belief that the Russian intelligence services were meddling politically and militarily in countries including Montenegro, Ukraine and Syria (MacAskill, 2018).

The Skripal attacks consequently represent an important shift in British foreign policy, from more passive to offensive measures when compared to previous inaction on other Russian assassinations, but when situated in the international context might be more easily understood. Although initially reluctant to bring consequences to an increasingly aggressive Russian state, the visibility of the Skripal attack and rejection of cooperation signalled that more action was required. It should be noted though, that “consequences” were still limited, and rhetoric has not matched action (Allan, 2018); however, the 2018 attack is significant for bringing tensions to the surface and facilitating subsequent online disinformation campaigns.

Specific to the Skripal attack, a full timeline of the events surrounding the attack is presented in Appendix A. All events covered in this paper occurred in 2018, therefore only a brief outline of events pertinent to this analysis are given. All data analysed was posted between March 4th - Sept 28th, 2018. As the focus of this paper is exactly how the Skripal

attack and subsequent political tensions were framed and structured by the Rusemb-London, it is first pertinent to present the changing role of the Embassy online along with how framing strategies had been employed previously in similar events. Consequently, the following section details the increasing popularity and controversy surrounding the Rusemb-London's Twitter account, the changing role of diplomacy online, and how visual politics allows for the evaluation of the Embassy Twitter account on social media, an inherently visual space.

2.2 Digital Diplomacy and the Russian Embassy

As ministries, embassies, ambassadors, and international institutions move online, they challenge the traditional views of diplomacy. Instead of one source of information coming from a diplomatic mission, this shifts to one where multiple voices of the state can work in a fragmented media environment to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and speak directly to foreign audiences (Galante, cited in Atlantic Council, 2018: 08:45; Manor, 2016). The role of state "multi-actors" defines a new space in diplomacy in the media environment, particularly on social media which is "...increasingly used as a tool for presenting and shaping the images of countries around the world" (Bjola, 2015: 7). The Russian state's embassies, foreign ministries and ambassadors in particular, are gaining considerable attention through their digital diplomatic efforts, especially surrounding conflict contexts.

The Rusemb-London, for example, has been one of the focal points in the discussion of official "Twiplomacy", or diplomatic action on Twitter, particularly as it was reported to be "the most-followed diplomatic mission in London, with 56,000 followers" in 2017, and this has increased to 89,800 followers as of June 2020 (Buckley, 2017; Robinson and Miltner, 2018). While this paper focuses on the Rusemb-London's representation of the Skripal poisonings, the account was increasingly controversial before March 2018, potentially as "Russia defines the UK as a digital battleground" and seeing a vulnerability, went into "hyper-mode" following the 2016 Brexit vote (Manor, cited in Buckley, 2017).

Previous discussions of the Rusemb-London's Twitter account have focused rather selectively on satirical or humorous posts, seen as the reason for its increasing popularity (Buckley, 2017). For example, Obama was described as a lame duck after Russian diplomats were expelled in 2016 and the supposed political and moral decline of the West

was highlighted through presenting Europeans “as ‘gay pigs’ confined to concentration camps” (Robinson and Miltner, 2018). Pepe the frog, an image co-opted by alt-right supporters and listed as a hate symbol, as well as tweets mocking paranoia over Russian cyber attacks (Taylor, 2017; Andrews, 2016) have also been used as controversial, attention-grabbing tweets from the Embassy in recent years (Appendix B).

When asked to comment on the account coordinators, the Rusemb-London suggested that the posts were a “collaborative effort” and declined to provide further details on account management (Russian Embassy cited in Luhn, 2017). There is speculation that a high-ranking aide at the Embassy created some of the more controversial tweets (Luhn, 2017), while others suggest that press attaché Konstantin Shlykov, with support from Ambassador Alexander Yakovenko, is responsible for the accounts (Buckley, 2017). Regardless of who creates the posts, increased media attention, as well as likes and retweets in the thousands are sure to signal the effectiveness of Russia’s digital diplomacy campaign, particularly as the account can claim 99.8% of its followers are genuine (Bedlam, 2018).

While media expert Charlie Beckett has argued that the impact of the account might be marginal, he believes that its purpose is to “sow mistrust and disaffection” and compares the purpose of the account to the goals of RT and Sputnik (Beckett, cited in Luhn, 2017). Others (Manor, 2017) concur with this statement, explaining: “Are they able to influence people in the UK... I’m not so sure... Are they able to grab attention, get their narrative into the press, to elites and opinion-makers? I’d say yes” (Manor, cited in Buckley, 2017). However, some, such as New York Times reporter Ellen Barry, might argue that the repercussions are more impactful. When interviewing Salisbury residents four months after the attack, Barry (cited in UCL, 2018: 20:02) noted that many people:

“...took the Russian side of the argument, some of them were young people who are reading material on social media, some of them were cab drivers who were talking to each other and occasionally there were people getting information from RT or from relatives in Bulgaria or Romania, but the point is that the counter-narrative had really gotten out there very thoroughly by the summer” (Barry, cited in UCL, 2018: 20:02).

Barry’s experiences in Salisbury, though anecdotal, suggest that there is a level of influence and impact on domestic audiences that comes as a consequence of attention-grabbing narratives. The impact of the Rusemb-London on social media, in

addition to Russian media, should therefore not be dismissed or downplayed when understanding persuasive, political conflict framing.

With increasing media attention and audience size, the Rusemb-London's portrayal of the Skripal poisonings on its Twitter account demonstrates a clear case to be deconstructed and analysed (Bedlam, 2018). As information is increasingly disseminated visually through poorly regulated social media sites, there is also a growing awareness of the need to focus analyses not only on official statements but on officially controlled social media (Manor and Crilley, 2018). These sources not only align with the political messages of the state but also avoid media domestic media regulators, such as Ofcom in the UK (ofcom.org.uk, 2019). Although frequently overlooked, images work symbolically and connotatively and messages from diplomatic sources are fundamentally political and impactful (Jones and Warlde, 2008: 56). Considering this, and the fact that Twitter is an inherently visual platform (Glynn, 2013), the "pictorial turn" (Mitchell, 2005) and visual framing is vital to this analysis and therefore detailed in the following section.

2.3 Visual Politics and Framing

Political analysis may typically be viewed through the lens of parliaments, politicians, and elections, but "shifts" in the field of analysis are leading to a broader incorporation of linguistic and visual representations of politics, power and social change. The *linguistic turn* may be more familiar now through the application of discourse analysis in political science, yet there has also been a *pictorial turn* over the last two decades which acknowledges the importance of the visual representations (Mitchell, 2005). A belief that visuals, particularly photographs, represent reality is misplaced however, as images deceive and require interpretation which is by no means a neutral or objective process, and relies on context, co-images and text (Bleiker, 2015: 875). Thus, when analyzing visual content, additional questions are required to understand the connection between images, emotions and beliefs to highlight how images are framed for a particular purpose (Bleiker, 2015: 876).

It is therefore the purpose of discourse to be the "raw material of communication... that actors plot into narratives" (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 8). Consequently, analysing textual and visual discourse can demonstrate particular biases or the ideology of the writers, editors, news sources and target audiences (Hutchings and Tolz, 2020) and also be

deconstructed to elicit how strategic narratives are constructed in political communication (Fairclough 1989; Entman, 1993). Robert Entman, who wrote the seminal article on framing, argued that events can be constructed through selecting and promoting aspects of “a perceived reality” thus making them appear more salient (Entman, 1993: 52). This framing in turn encourages “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation...” (Entman, 1993: 52) which may not accurately represent the event but facilitates political aims.

Numerous studies demonstrate the importance of political framing of images and events online as more analyses are being applied to deconstruct political conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, and pave the way for other conflicts to be analysed (Venkatesh, et. al, 2018). Hansen (2015) for example, outlined the visual importance of Abu Ghraib torture photographs by detailing both the content of the images and the political impact they created, while Crilley (2017) compared images on social media in Syria between Syrian government-backed forces and opposition using content and discourse analysis to identify narrative themes employed by each side. Manor and Crilley (2018) also persuasively outlined how images, frames and narratives reinforce each other in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Twitter account during the 2004 Gaza War. Through content and framing analysis, Manor and Crilley (2018) argued that proactive and reactive methods frame both actors and events in conflict, and that frames are continuously being created chronologically allowing for a perpetual legitimization of actions while reframing counter-arguments and criticisms, all of which can be deconstructed to reveal government motives, ambitions, and vulnerabilities (Manor and Crilley, 2018: 378).

Entman (1993) however, warns that researchers using content analyses to demonstrate political frames should be aware of saliency and influence, meaning a simple quantitative analysis based on frequency does not demonstrate relationships (Entman, 1993). Decoding frames, therefore, requires not only a focus on saliency but an understanding of the political objectives of the frames situated within strategic narratives (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 18). Communication is consequently a multistage process, incorporating the communicator, text, receiver and culture (Entman, 1993: 52). However, this inevitably highlights a key challenge in framing online, in that it requires a multidimensional analysis.

Roland Bleiker, author of *Visual Politics*, has been vital at bringing abstract concepts of framing to a more structured framework. In response to this multimodal need, Bleiker

(2015) has answered what Manor and Crilley (2018) argued to be a lack of effective methodology in visual image and social media analyses of ‘if and how such frames are constructed and disseminated’ (Manor and Crilley, 2018: 373). Bleiker (2015) outlines similar stages as Entman (1993) using the terms *production*, *content*, and *impact* but stresses the employment of different methodological strategies when analysing images. First, production involves questioning how the images were taken, who took and selected the images and how they reach the public (Bleiker, 2015: 877). Undertaking this type of analysis typically relies on interviews or ethnography (Bleiker, 2015: 877), which in the context of this essay is not possible as the Rusemb-London has not been forthcoming regarding content management on social media.

Next, the content analysis utilizes compositional, semiotic, and discourse analysis tools to describe the image’s details, symbolic representations which may be culturally or politically imbued, and then uses discourse techniques to discuss the power relationship, specifically “who is depicted, who is not, and what that means for politics” (Bleiker, cited in Bleiker and Hutchison, 2020: 21:10). While this stage is increasing complex and challenging due to the speed, changeability, and democratization of online content, it is also one of the most important parts of visual analysis as it demonstrates how the images signal socio-political salience (Bleiker, 2015: 878).

Bleiker (cited in Bleiker and Hutchison 2020: 27:14) focuses more on “social and cultural context conditions” surrounding the images; yet, images themselves are multimodal, combining visual and textual features, co-text (alongside an image) or image-text (within an image) (Smelik, 2006; Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, textual discourse analysis is an important tool to include in the analysis to conceptualize events and arguments within broader strategic narratives and offers interpretations of the images (Manor and Crilley, 2018: 378). This area is also important to understand as “the relationship between words and images in news texts” is both overlooked and understudied (Jones and Wardle, 2008: 57).

In particular, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tools are useful to help deconstruct how the producer intends the image to be interpreted by the reader (Van Leeuwen, 2016). CDA fits well within the goals of visual analysis as it seeks to reveal power differences and discrimination and is frequently applied to media analysis due to the variety of tools which can be flexibly applied depending on necessity (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). As images

require interpretation, these textual clues are also key to sculpting an understanding of the content (Bleiker, 2015: 875). It is obvious though, that interpretation cannot be neutral and will inevitably bring visual researchers to reinterpret how images are created by the producer and interpreted by the consumer. Thus, reflexivity is required on the part of the researcher, as well as an understanding that an analysis of images and text itself does not aim for objective truth but rather to better highlight constructive attempts at explaining reality (Bleiker, 2015: 887).

The third and final stage of Bleiker's framework (2015) requires an analysis of impact to identify the emotional reactions that individuals have to particular frames or images/texts which can lead to changes in belief or behaviour (Bleiker and Hutchison 2020: 19:35). Even with more quantitative tools, ethnographic research, and cross-disciplinary partnerships with social psychology and communication sciences, impact is difficult to evaluate as it relies on understanding emotions, something viewed as personal and private (Bleiker, 2015: 876). Consequently, the analysis presented in this paper is primarily concerned with the second stage, content analysis, as an understanding of impact on the receiver would require an alternative analysis on attitudes, opinions and behaviour which is beyond the scope of this paper (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 8).

This section aimed to identify a gap in the visual analysis of online diplomacy. Why the Skripal poisoning is a salient case in the Russo-British relationship was presented, followed by a discussion on why the Rusemb-London should be viewed as an important actor in the digital diplomatic space. Following this, why a visual analysis with textual support is best suited to deconstructing political framing on social media was discussed with examples of its use in other political and military conflicts. However, deconstructing visual politics online also requires knowledge of context, for example the strategic narratives utilized in the framing process, and therefore the following section expands on the relevant theory connected to Russian strategic narratives. As these narratives are situated in a broader context of Russian disinformation, the following section first outlines key terms and concepts surrounding disinformation which provides the theoretical foundations for this paper.

3.0 Theory

As this paper situates the Rusemb-London's Twitter coverage of the Skripal poisoning in the field of disinformation, it is necessary to highlight the challenges surrounding the use of this particular term, as well as the proliferation of high-frequency terminology connected to this field. Disinformation has been used to varying degrees to describe purposefully inaccurate or misleading information (Jack, 2017). However, given the current proliferation of terminology and the over / under application of particular terms, the language of information can cause confusion, inaccuracy and hyperbole. This section therefore outlines key terms and concepts of disinformation most relevant to this analysis. Following this, key strategic narratives pertinent to this analysis are outlined to situate the Rusemb-London's framing of the Skripal poisoning within a broader theoretical framework.

3.1 Disinformation

Disinformation and influence operations are two frequently used terms to describe problematic information (Jack, 2017). However, variations in meaning, although seemingly small, are important when discussing information terminology in regard to agents, message and audience, in other words "how information spreads, who spreads it, and who receives it" (Jack, 2017: 1). Disinformation can be generally understood as when "false information is knowingly shared to cause harm" in contrast to misinformation, "when false information is shared, but no harm is meant" (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017: 5). Although the difference between disinformation and misinformation appears to be clear, the attribution of *intent to cause harm* can challenge academic, political and legal practitioners (Seidenberg, 2017).

With this in mind, understanding disinformation as the falsification of information with *intent to harm*, Warlde and Derakhshan of the Council of Europe (2017) argue that it is necessary to consider the agent, message and interpreter, or audience, to more accurately identify *intent* behind problematic information (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017: 6):



Figure 2: Phases of Information Disorder (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017: 6)

The division of problematic content, pictured above, provides a useful framework to understand many features of disinformation. In particular, Warlde and Derakhshan’s (2017) *agent*, *message*, *interpreter*, parallels Bleiker’s (2015) visual methodological structure of *production*, *content*, *impact* and can act as a theoretical-methodological foundation for this analysis. For example, the *agent* informs the *production* of the information, *message* informs what and how the *content* is portrayed strategically, and *interpreter* informs how audiences are *impacted* by the information. Although production, content, and impact allow for an analysis of content drawing on important compositional, semiotic and discourse features; pairing these categories with *agent*, *message*, *interpreter* allows for a more strategic analysis of intentions behind disinformation. It is therefore useful to identify the perimeters of these categories in relation to disinformation. As the primary focus of this analysis is on content, subsequent attention is focused on *message* in the following discussion, although *agent* and *interpreter* are also briefly detailed below.

3.1.1 Agent

The motivations behind the creation and dissemination of content are necessary in attributing *intent* to disinform. Where problematic information is created under state guidance with tight levels of information organisation, created and disseminated by human interlocutors, as is the case for the Rusemb-London, *intent to harm* is clearer and can be categorized as disinformation (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017: 23). In contrast, other agents, such as low paid trolls, have different motivations and *intent to cause harm* is more

difficult to attribute (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017: 23). Although Warlde and Derakhshan (2017) attempt to qualify actors' *intent to cause harm* to be differentiated between creators and disseminators who may not be motivated by intent, rather financial reward, it still holds that any agent knowingly spreading false content to manipulate public opinion constitutes a disinformation actor. While some may be doing so for a variety of reasons, such as financial gains, *intent to harm* is embedded in the knowledge of the falsification of information intended to mislead.

3.1.2 Message and Intent

In Warlde and Derakhshan's, (2017) framework, *Message* is the second feature that should be analyzed in information disorder campaigns. In this framework, characteristics of disinformation are highlighted, specifically that they are emotional, visual, repetitive and follow a strong narrative (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017: 26). Warlde and Derakhshan (2017) identify a variety of methods that audiences use to evaluate information credibility which are useful in the presentation of online influence operations (Paul and Matthews, 2016). Particularly relevant to this analysis is *Endorsement* "whether others find it credible", *Consistency* "whether the message is echoed by multiple sites" and *Persuasive intent*, which here combines features of quantity of information and visual appeal (Warlde and Derakhshan 2017: 45).

It is possible to argue that online endorsement of the Russian Embassy Twitter is demonstrated by its significant number of followers which, as of July 2020, is over 89.8 thousand (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>). This does not indicate which of these followers are there for personal or professional interest, or the level of agreement they might have with the content; yet it does demonstrate the increasing popularity of the Twitter account, and thus public *endorsement*. Endorsement might also be demonstrated by the cross-platform content sharing on Russian media, for example where the Russian Ambassador might contribute to RT editorials (Chatterly-Doody, cited in UCL, 2018: 43:39) or when RT content is visible on the Russian Embassy social media platforms.

Consistency might traditionally refer to a strategic, clear and coherent narrative (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013). However, when considering Russian communication, this conceptualization should be altered from consisting of one coherent narrative to having a fragmented system of multiple (often contrasting) narratives reinforced by multiple sources

(Pomerantsev, 2014) and are consistent in their inconsistency. Although this multi-narrative approach, or *firehose of falsehood* (Paul and Matthews, 2016), seems disconnected, analyses on Russian media demonstrate that particular narratives can be identified and categorized to provide a deeper understanding of specific events, which can then be compared across platforms (reframingrussia.com; Gorenburg, 2019). Consequently, cross-sectional analysis of the media environment can provide examples demonstrating consistency in the overall application of Russian narratives.

Persuasive intent can be found in the construction and quantity of information. First, as the amount of information increases, competing messages can become overwhelmed (Paul and Matthews, 2016). With multiple channels sharing the same undermining narratives, as is often the case with the Russian government-supported content and framing, target audiences will increasingly be persuaded to accept certain narratives (Paul and Matthews, 2016: 3). This is even more the case on social media where posts, images, and comments can be shared by other users, but also by other salient ministries or actors which increases not only the quantity of information, but also the endorsement of particular messages.

Persuasion is also impacted by images, making visual politics salient on social media, “because we believe our own eyes, but know well that people are manipulative, we tend to be verbally skeptical and visually gullible” (Joo, et. al, 2014: 2). The construction of reality by fusing together looking, seeing, and knowing are therefore problematic in visual disinformation, as “seeing is believing” - cognition and visuals are conflated to create pseudo-knowledge (Jenks, 1995: 1,3). In more abstract terms, it is not only the direct representation of a symbol’s meaning that we understand. Images can also become empty signifiers where the original meaning is altered and imbued with peripheral concepts thus altering what societies perceive them to mean (Laclau, 1996). One relevant example already discussed is Pepe the Frog, which began as a simple cartoon but is now is a symbol of the alt-right (Taylor, 2017). Therefore, although we see the “real world,” the visual representations of it are often created by particular sources and audiences can be persuaded into genuine belief of constructed concepts (Jenks, 1995). This argument aligns with Fairclough’s (1989) argument that discourse is created by power and as such should be deconstructed and analysed to reveal hidden ideologies and biases.

Although these are important operational features, the categorization of *messages* could be expanded further to consider additional objectives behind information rather than

describing purely operational features. For example, to understand the potential for *intent to cause harm*, the purposes behind information campaigns needs to be expanded and included under the categorization of disinformation. Without this consideration the term *disinformation* becomes incapable of conceptualizing the stealthier, partial discourses which aim to subvert societies (Corner, 2007: 676). Consequently, message intent should include information which aims to decrease institutional trust, weaken societal cohesion, and increase confusion (Wilson, 2011).

Under this expanded understanding of *message intent*, there are key concepts to discuss, namely information warfare, which marks an important shift from simple accuracy of information to the strategic *intent* of information outcomes disseminated by political actors during times of both peace and conflict (Wilson, 2015; Giles, 2016). Specifically, information warfare highlights intentions and purposes for aggressive persuasion campaigns, although aims and objectives are often unclear (Nielsen and Paabo, 2015) and vary according to context. Information warfare is a cognitive form of warfare designed to perpetually disrupt, confuse and distract the targeted population (Wilson, 2015). The tools used to conduct information warfare have proliferated alongside technological capabilities, for example “...fake or real news media for planting disinformation; troll campaigns; official government statements; speeches at rallies or demonstrations; defamatory YouTube videos; direct messages by SMS...” (Giles, 2016: 6).

Consequently, information warfare is applicable to this paper as the Embassy uses perpetual messaging on Twitter to confuse and plant inaccurate information which does not focus on one key event but creates a continuous space of contradictory messaging. This aspect of continuous degradation of the perceived opponent’s information space is designed to blur the boundaries between wartime and peacetime by creating a perpetual state of conflict (Giles, 2016: 6). If boundless technology and uncontrollable information can cause institutional and cognitive harm, the strategic shift that the Russian government operates in should be recognized. For example, instead of coexistence with the West, the Russian government now uses wartime tactics with regards to information continuously, thus existing in perpetual conflict with the West (Giles, 2016: 6).

If declining on the geopolitical stage, which some (Giles, 2019) believe to be the case, a Great Power narrative is used to preserve the position and claims of the political elite and involves damaging an opponent instead of improving national conditions. This “security

dilemma” was highlighted by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, who claimed that enhancement of Russian security will only be successful after the weakening of all other geopolitical opponents and comes at the expense of other nations’ security (Lavrov, cited in Giles, 2019: 21). Accordingly, the role of information warfare is a targeted, planned, strategic form of disinformation designed to weaken Western democracy and cohesion, thus facilitating Great Power claims of the Russian state (Giles, 2019). While the Skripal poisoning represents a specific event that might signal a higher degree of relevance in security terms, the framing and narratives used by official state sources can still be situated within information warfare as it represents a perpetual deterioration of a Western government’s information space, aims to confuse and persuade British audiences, and constrains and undermines event details.

In information warfare, specific tactics can be used by the Russian state, which should also be highlighted, as they are visible in the analysis of this paper. UK security analyst Ben Nimmo (2015) most succinctly identified these tactics outlining what he called the Russian governments 4D approach to disinformation: dismiss, distort, distract, and dismay (Nimmo, 2015). Dismissing refers to a negation of events, for example that Russian troops were not in Crimea, despite factual evidence to the contrary (Nimmo, 2015). The DFR Lab also extends this to undermining criticism by disputing the reputation of the accuser (DFR Lab, 2019). Distortion identifies the manipulation of facts, statements, or evidence away from its intended purpose (Nimmo, 2015). For example, during protests in Moscow in 2019, the Russian government accused the US Embassy in Moscow of promoting protests, and thus intervening in domestic affairs by providing a map of the protest route (despite the fact that the route was clearly displayed with an explicit advisory for US citizens to avoid, not join) (DFR Lab, 2019). Distortion can also extend to hyperbole, for example when the Russian Embassy in Ottawa, Canada claimed that “Canada is harbouring Ukrainian fascists who are directing anti-Russian policies by the Canadian government” because senior politicians had Ukrainian grandparents and the Canadian government has opposed Russian action in Ukraine (Brown, 2019).

Distraction refers to creating alternative information to bring attention away from the original conflict, including conspiracy theories, and are used to “create uncertainty, confusion, and ultimately a doubt whether any source can be trusted without detailed personal experience” (Nimmo, 2015). Nimmo (2015) highlights alternative possibilities

that were associated with the MH17 downing, specifically that the Ukrainian government was behind the plane crash and blamed Russia to increase public support (Vice News, 2014), that MH-17 and MH-370 were the same plane, or even that the crash was staged (Nimmo, 2015). Finally, dismay is designed to warn of “disastrous consequences” for countering Russian demands and aimed at intimidating opponents (Nimmo, 2015). Although the term connotes panic, it might be more accurate to describe this as bullying or threatening. For example, when the German media outlet *Deutsche Welle* (DW) provided unfavourable coverage of the Moscow protests, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “threatened to revoke DW’s accreditation” (DFR Lab, 2019). The category of *Message* consequently encompasses not only the content but also the evaluations, tactics, and duration of disinformation.

3.1.3 Interpreter / Audience

Finally in Warlde and Derakhshan’s (2017) framework, *interpreter* is presented as the impact of the messaging on either beliefs or behaviour. The analysis presented in this paper does not aim to evaluate the impact of the messages on audience behaviour and beliefs, as this requires a different methodological strategy, although Barry’s (2018) anecdotal evidence presented in Section 2.2 does suggest a vulnerability created by British secrecy surrounding the event (Barry, cited in UCL, 2018). This information void was effectively filled by Russian state messages which were in turn taken up by many residents in Salisbury, (Barry, cited in UCL, 2018) and likely by members of the public in many other British cities.

In the field of disinformation, terminology proves to be one of the main challenges in an effective analysis. In this section, I have used Warlde and Derakhshan’s (2017) framework as a starting point to divide *agent*, *message* and *interpreter* (or *audience*). Yet, how disinformation can be operationalized also requires consideration of strategic narratives as the communications methods used to confuse, persuade or overwhelm target audiences in information warfare. Consequently, the following section provides a discussion on strategic narrative terminology and highlights four key narratives relevant to this analysis.

3.2 Narratives

Narratives are typically used to help make sense of chaos or change, express identity, or to co-create a worldview that can incorporate others who share the same social values (Murray, 2015). While there are structural variations, they generally feature three characteristics: they fit within an overarching theme often connected to a moral cause, are structured temporally, and are founded on an event (Ewick and Silbey 1995, cited in Yamane 2000). Through their ability to order a plotline and increase comprehension, cohesion, and collective beliefs, they are fundamental in any communication environment, existing at the intersection between power and communication (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013). In the political context, understanding narratives can provide a “holistic understanding that is absent from overtly atomised accounts of the regime’s policies” (Bacon, 2012: 769). Therefore, narrative analysis is a useful tool when applied to the analysis of international events as it can help conceptualize motives, world views, techniques, and policies of individual countries and their governments (Bacon, 2012).

Strategic narratives have similar features to narratives yet are also purpose built for the international political arena (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 7). Miskimmon, et. al. (2013: 2) give a comprehensive definition of strategic narratives as:

“a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate” (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 2).

In political analysis, there is a shift away from *narratives*, which explain “stories”, to these *strategic narratives* which take a more active role in constructing our understanding of events as they relate to political goals, and are frequently utilized in the conceptualization of war, security and strategic communication (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 7). A goal of a strategic narrative analysis is therefore to understand the communication patterns of dominant political actors who impose their own order on selected events (Bacon, 2012: 771). Explicitly addressing these patterns such as the selection, omission, connection, and interpretation processes of these strategic narratives means the political goals and motivation of a state can be revealed (Bacon, 2012: 771). While an analysis of individual events are important to better understand the building blocks of contentious politics,

disinformation tactics, and persuasive techniques, it is also necessary to situate individual events within the broader political narrative, or more specifically within constructed strategic narratives (Bacon, 2012).

Strategic narratives, like traditional ones, tend to fit within a grand narrative which encapsulates notions of nation-branding and state-identity (Szostek, 2017: 571). In the Russian context, this overarching theme can be situated in the quest for Great Power status (Szostek, 2017: 577). For Giles (2019), “a crucial element of Russia’s self-perception that determines how it interacts with the outside world is an obsessive belief in its right to be treated, not as a ‘normal country’, but as one of the two or three most important nations in the world” (Giles, 2019: 13). Specifically, this includes buffer zones between Russia and its perceived adversary (the West), vetoes and consultations regarding global affairs, and most saliently in this case study, “a get-out clause – an exemption from the rules that ordinarily govern interstate behaviour” (Galeotti, 2018 in Giles, 2019: 13).

It is perhaps Russia’s drive for Great Power status which leads it into confrontation with the West (Giles, 2019). However, for Giles, (2019) Russian perceptions of Great Power status are fundamentally interconnected with security and the militarization of Russia, which is based on the belief that brute force increases respect (Giles, 2019: 18). While Russian military campaigns internally and externally can be a realization of this belief in force; there is also an acknowledgement of limitations which have forced the expansion of security into nonconventional arenas, specifically information (Giles, 2016: 16). Thus, while the overarching strategic narrative focuses on Great Power status, the means of achieving this are two-fold, first militarily and second through the reflexive control and manipulation of information to destabilize adversaries through psychological or emotional influence (Giles, 2016: 21). Through “defying Western criticism” rather than “pursuing Western approval” Great Power status that does not rely on economic development or international influence is within reach (Giles, 2019:13). It is through silencing criticism and undermining perceived oppositional entities that the control of information can be weaponized through the construction of strategic narratives (Szostek, 2018: 117).

3.2.1 Strategic Narratives

While Great Power status can be seen as an overarching narrative theme, strategic narratives explain how separate events can fit flexibly together to reinforce this broader

aim (Bacon, 2012: 780). Dmitry Gorenburg (2019) at the Marshall Center has identified ten commonly used narratives, such as *Eurasia Versus Europe*, *Russia as a Bastion of Traditional Values*, *Fraternalism*, and *Russia as a Leader and Promoter of International Structures* (Gorenburg, 2019). While this provides a comprehensive analysis of available strategic narratives, here, four key strategic narratives are presented which are most relevant to this analysis namely *Hypocrisy*, *Decaying West*, *Russian Protection / Russkiy Mir*, and the most frequently employed, *Russophobia*. The categories here are not only based on Gorenburg's (2019) analysis but combined with other research from Szostek (2017) and Bacon (2012) who have also carried out substantial content analyses on Russian disinformation narratives. The amalgamation of multiple sources allows for a flexible selection of strategic narratives relevant to this context, but also highlights how research conducted in this field has led to a proliferation of terms, which often overlap, yet serve to identify the same objectives.

First, *Hypocrisy*, or *Whataboutism*, brings to light alleged double standards aimed at tarnishing the reputation of Western governments (Szostek, 2017: 580; Gorenburg, 2019). Delegitimizing Western criticisms through identifying hypocritical actions or statements serves to present Russian actions as acceptable in comparison, rather than remedy any wrongdoings (Szostek, 2017: 579). This line of argumentation is not new as *Whataboutism*, a Soviet propaganda tactic, was often used to the same effect, to blur boundaries between actors and aggressions, abdicate responsibility by identifying others' unethical or illegal actions, and shift attention away Soviet actions (Gordy, 2013: 102; Fallon, 2017). In fact, Gorenburg (2019) still identifies *Whataboutism* as a current tactic rather than one from the Soviet era, used to "suggest that Russia is no different from the Western states that regularly condemn Russian behaviour..." (Gorenburg, 2019).

Next, the *Decaying West* strategic narrative argues that internal conflicts will cause Europe to fall apart (Ukraine Crisis Centre, 2018). Specifically, this narrative argues that the unified goals of the West are unsustainable, unrealistic "European values" are imposed rather than subscribed to, and "...unjust, biased media, puppet politicians, pedophilia and neo-Nazism" are common in the EU (Ukraine Crisis Centre, 2018: 36). Szostek (2017) expands on this concept, referring to it as an anti-Western or anti-American strategic narrative, that is used to protect Russian beliefs and values from encroaching challenges to Russian identity, and connects the West with arguments of criminality and immorality

(Szostek, 2017: 580). This framing also facilitates the complementary positioning of Russia as a *Bastion of Traditional Values* which places the Russian civilization as distinct and “embodies and promotes “‘traditional’ religious, societal, and other values in contrast with more liberal, ‘decadent’ West” (Gorenburg, 2019). The Ukraine Crisis Centre claims that there is growing focus on this narrative, particularly because it allows for the representation of Russia as the defender not only of values but significantly, of international law (Darczewska and Zochowski, 2015: 11), thus allowing the Russian state’s actions to appear not only moral but legal.

Russian Protection/Ruskiy Mir (Russian World) narratives are historically premised as a result of changing borders when ethnic Russian communities found themselves outside the post-USSR Russian state territory (Diener, 2015; Brubaker, 1995: 108). In this context, the Russian government claims the “...right, and obligation, to protect the interests of diaspora Russians” if they are under threat from an anti-Russian force (Brubaker, 1995: 127). Using particularly subjective claims of threat, this strategic narrative, linked with features of *Fraternalism* (Gorenburg, 2019), can bolster support for Russian intervention in so-called near abroad countries, thus justifying military actions such as in Ukraine (Horlo, 2018: 46; Oates and Gray, 2019). Although in the case study presented here, the UK clearly does not qualify as a near abroad nation, this narrative is still relevant as the right to protect Russian citizens, the Skripals, is frequently employed, regardless of any rejections of help from the Skripals themselves (Barry, 2018). While it might seem strange to refer to the *Ruskiy Mir* narrative in a British context, I continue to use this term to avoid terminology confusion but intend it to encapsulate a more expanded version to encompass Russian citizens abroad.

Finally, *Russophobia* is frequently evoked by the Russian government to attack other states’ responses to Russian actions. Invigorated through information technologies and reaching maturity under Putin, this narrative fuses the concepts of the Russian state and Russians as people, meaning that attacks on the state are attacks on Russian nationality and identity (Darczewska and Zochowski, 2015: 9). Specifically, criticism of the Russian state or its actions outside its borders can be called into question by the implication that criticisms are founded on prejudice, not fact (Oates and Steiner, 2018: 3). While *Russophobia* narratives are particularly salient on Russian media channels such as RT and Sputnik (Oates and Steiner, 2018: 4), other sources such as diplomatic missions, for

example the Russian Embassy accounts, have also been operationalizing this strategic narrative to undermine and mock foreign states as this analysis will demonstrate.

In this sense, *Russophobia* does not only equate to anti-Russian statements, but features distorted derivatives. An example relevant to this context is the phrase “highly likely” used by UK Prime Minister Theresa May when discussing the probability of Russian state involvement in the Skripal poisoning (Oates and Steiner, 2018: 4). Russian official accounts and sources focused on the phrase “highly likely” to create doubt about Russian involvement, arguing that “highly likely” was “a new invention of the British diplomacy to describe why they punish people... sentence first – verdict afterwards” (Lavrov, 2018 cited in Oates and Steiner, 2018: 4). Without clear evidence to follow May’s “highly likely” statement, the Russian state and state-backed media were able to argue that the only thing they had done wrong was to be Russian, and consequently that the accusations of Russian state involvement were based on bias and *Russophobia* (Oates and Steiner, 2018). Additionally, any evidence or facts presented which pointed to Russian involvement could equally be dismissed or called into question under this *punish first, guilt later* argument (Oates and Steiner, 2018). *Russophobia* therefore allows for the framing of Russia as a scapegoat, an actor to blame for any Western problem instead of “dealing with the actual causes” of social or political issues (Gorenburg, 2019).

These four strategic narratives, *Hypocrisy*, *Decaying West*, *Ruskiy Mir* and *Russophobia*, demonstrate how events can be organized, explained, and distorted to promote the Russian state’s world view, motivated by Great Power status and security claims (Oates and Steiner, 2018). Understanding how these strategic narratives are coopted and interconnected during an event through framing deconstruction can help to better understand potential counter measures which do not simply rely on presenting facts and figures to counter Russian state claims and accusations (Oates and Steiner, 2018: 5). However, understanding the need to counter detrimental strategic narratives also requires a better understanding of the disconnect between narrative and reality that these narratives work within, which is key to understanding framing structures.

3.2.2 Reconceptualizing Strategic Narrative Aims

Decoupling of narratives from facts and proof requires a conceptual shift of reality, best outlined in Pomerantsev’s “Nothing is True, and Everything is Possible” (Pomerantsev,

2014). For Pomerantsev, creating a post-ideological state where multiple, shifting narratives exist epitomizes the shift from Cold War propaganda as it focuses less on confrontation and more on sewing division from the inside (Pomerantsev, 2014, 2015). In other words, classic propaganda designed to persuade someone *of* something has been redesigned to persuade the public into disbelieving or doubting facts and evidence (Dawson and Innes, 2019: 254), and frequently uses taunting and mockery to amplify counternarratives (Pomerantsev, 2014). The aim is therefore to create “a state of profound and radical doubt about what to believe—a state of epistemic anarchy” (Dawson and Innes, 2019: 254). In this context where facts are not anchored in reality, the Russian state can claim Great Power status aided by strategic narratives to promote its interests and subvert criticism.

This detachment from reality has major implications for understanding strategic narratives and consequently how to deconstruct event framing. Referring back to the beginning of this section, narratives are typically constructed temporally in order to increase cohesion and comprehension (Ewick and Silbey 1995, cited in Yamane 2000). However, if the aim of a narrative is to increase confusion and distrust, this important element in traditional narratives is no longer relevant. Subsequently, Russian strategic narratives designed to increase doubt can be disorganized, contradictory, and purely fictional, as they amplify areas of vulnerability in the communications of adversaries, creating space for what is possible, not what is true (Pomerantsev, 2014).

Sources using these disharmonious strategic narratives are increasingly official ones, which have found a useful resource in social media for communicating directly to foreign audiences. On the one hand, states with a monopoly on political communication have been significantly challenged as a result of the change in the media environment which has seen non-state actors increasingly capture space and challenge the discursive control of power (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 45). On the other hand, the focus on non-state actors ignores the increase of state actors online, and rests on an outdated assumption that state and diplomatic communication methods are static and focused on upholding the status quo (Bjola, 2015: 2). In actual fact, with an increase in state actors online, the state’s voice is amplified, and strategic narratives are spread across multiple sources, thus appearing more genuine or plausible.

It is the aim of these state messages that needs to be recognized when attempting to understand the purpose of strategic narratives and event framing. Messages that aim to present positive, soft power representations of their nations and explain or justify state actions are standard in international diplomacy (Bjola, 2015). However, when shifting into this new understanding of constructed events over facts, questions over answers, and chaos over clarity, there are alternative goals to communication.

Having discussed the theoretical framework of disinformation and strategic narratives, the following section presents the methodology used in this case study. Specifically, the research questions, data collected, and methodology used for analysis are presented followed by the analysis of the Rusemb-London's tweets on the Skripal poisoning.

4.0 Methodology

After reviewing the current research on disinformation, strategic narratives and digital representations of visual conflict by state actors, it becomes clear that although there is a significant amount of research on Russian information warfare and strategic narratives, there is a lack of research on how Russian diplomatic sources are framing conflict online, particularly on social media. This merits further investigation, particularly as, in terms of followers, the Rusemb-London's Twitter account is effective at projecting key narratives into the border online environment.

This paper therefore seeks to explore how the Rusemb-London used a predominantly visual social media platform, specifically Twitter, to communicate strategic narratives designed to undermine Western communication and, in this case, provide alternative explanations for a chemical weapons attack on British soil. Through deconstructing the building blocks of the narratives used to facilitate this disinformation campaign, it is hoped that a stronger understanding will emerge of how images and co-text are used on social media to further the aims and objectives of undermining Western accusations and increasing public confusion and doubt. The Skripal attacks present a unique opportunity to deconstruct these narratives through visual content analysis as the poisoning was a salient event in the relationship between Russia and Britain and prompted large amounts of disinformation online.

Considering these factors, my specific research questions in this analysis are as follows:

1. How can the images and discourse from the Russian Embassy London Twitter account be deconstructed through a visual content analysis to better understand representations of agents, events, and messages?
2. What can these frames demonstrate about the broader Russian strategic narratives in the media environment, specifically on the Rusemb-London's social media?

These research questions focus primarily on the content of the images and co-text. Consequently, the analysis presented in this paper does not detail the impact of this content on the receiver as this would require different data and methods to illuminate the effects of this account on public attitudes, opinions, and behaviour (Miskimmon, et. al. 2013: 8).

To understand how broader narratives and strategies used on the Rusemb-London’s Twitter account were constructed, a ‘corpus’ of images was collected. This was accomplished through the Twitter Advanced Search option which allows users to retrieve tweets from particular words, phrases, accounts, engagements, and dates (<https://twitter.com/search-advanced?lang=en>) (Figure 2 below). While many social media analyses make use of collection tools to gather Twitter data through identifying particular hashtags (#) or key words, after a brief manual search on the *@RussianEmbassyUK* account it was clear that a manual collection was more useful as many posts did not contain specific hashtags. Manual collection of the tweets posted, therefore allowed for a larger number of relevant posts to be identified, which would have escaped automated scraping tools.

As this paper focuses on the Russian narratives created by the Embassy, “Replies” and “Mentions” were filtered out of the search. Twitter does not allow mass collection of data through the advanced search function, and therefore the process dates were divided, and searches were conducted multiple times to collect the corpus of tweets, with search times overlapping to ensure a complete collection of relevant tweets:

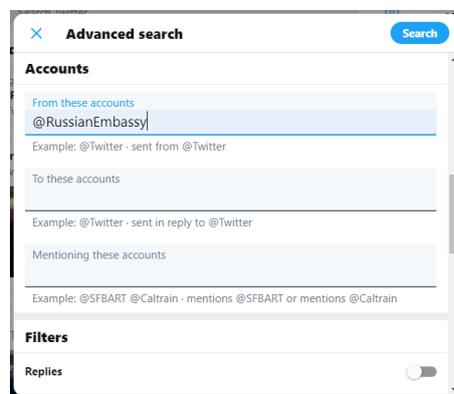


Figure 2: Twitter Advanced Search (<https://twitter.com/search-advanced?lang=en>)

Collection of the tweets began with those posted on March 4th, 2018 and ended on 28th of September 2018. This timeframe encapsulated the main events surrounding the poisoning and political retaliations from both Russian and British governments, and additionally demonstrated a point of saturation where the narratives showed significant repetition, thus providing sufficient data for aims of this analysis. Although information was released on the identification of “Alexander Petrov” and “Ruslan Boshirov” on 5th September, the tweets were collected until the end of September to allow for reaction to this information (UCL, 2018). In total 319 images were collected, however there were variations on the

relevance to the Skripal theme with some being directly connected to the poisonings, while others made more indirect references to the political context. Where tweets fell too far outside this case study, they were not included in the data collection although they may have added support to framings in the Skripal case. For example, despite the fact that the themes of Syria and Salisbury were often connected in reference to chemical attacks and international tension, tweets were included of the OPCW if they mentioned Salisbury, Skripal or the UK, but not if they focused only on Syria.

4.1 Visual Content Analysis

After compiling the corpus of images, an inductive content analysis was conducted which “refrains from analyzing news stories with a priori defined news frames in mind”, in contrast to a deductive analysis which works within pre-defined frames (De Vresse, 2005: 53). While a deductive analysis may be more beneficial when attempting to understand how particular narratives are operationalized, this study takes a bottom-up approach to understand how images and co-text were used to frame the event.

Images were therefore grouped together where there were visual similarities. The decision to categorize images by visual similarity as opposed to chronological order resulted from research conducted in the literature review. Previous research and analyses on visual politics follow a chronological framing analysis to identify narratives (Manor and Crilley, 2018; Crilley, 2017; Seo and Ebrahim, 2016). However, as Russia disinformation works to undermine opponents’ narratives rather than constructing chronological ones, messages are often disconnected, conflicting and sporadic (Paul and Matthews, 2016). Attempting to find chronological patterns would thus be misunderstanding the purpose of the information and would not lead to a deeper understanding of how different representations of actors, events, and messages were created.

By interpreting frames as persistent patterns “of selection, emphasis and exclusion” (Gitlin 2003: 7) it was possible to organize the tweets into visual categories rather than sequential events. Clear patterns were first identified, such as actors, locations, and media, and were subsequently subdivided to better isolate content features. While not all images fit into categories, many demonstrated clear similarities and this categorization was therefore broadly divided into actor, event, and message. Based on both frequency of image content and saliency, sub-groups were selected and analyzed. As a result, some image categories

contain visually consistent tweets, while other categories showed greater diversity yet were still grouped together as they visualized the same content. Although many of the miscellaneous tweets were interesting and created unique, controversial content, it is neither practical nor desirable to incorporate every image into this analysis, and consequently sub-groups with the most salient framing or highly visible patterns were selected to be further discussed.

Employing Bleiker's (2015) three step analysis for content analysis, sub-groups of images were first analysed by composition and semiotics features. Although this is a highly interpretive method, it is also supported by surrounding images and text, making it difficult to take one image far from its original context. After the composition and semiotic analysis, Bleiker (2015) proposes a discourse analysis to understand how images represent power relations; however, Bleiker (2015) does not outline clear methods of doing so. Instead, this stage seems to rely on situating images in a socio-political context to highlight how power relations might be identified (Bleiker, 2015). In this analysis however, as the images are tweets which include text, some aspects of CDA were used to highlight features of linguistic framing where relevant, for example when referencing of social actors or particular narratives alongside images. This does not constitute a full critical discourse analysis, rather it is used to highlight linguistic features to compare the images and strategic narratives used in the data collected.

To conduct Bleiker's (2015) full analysis on visual data also requires discussing production and impact as well as content. Yet, as previously identified, due to a lack of information surrounding the production site, specifically who is creating and controlling the content of the Twitter account (Luhn, 2017), it is assumed here that as an official diplomatic account, the content aligns with Russian foreign policy aims and objectives. Additionally, as discussed earlier, impact analysis requires a more in-depth behavioural understanding of emotions evoked when presented with information. While this is beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to look at the popularity of tweets to get an indication of which tweets, frames and narratives generate higher interactions from the audience. For the purposes of understanding tweet popularity, interactions with posts are quantified as the sum of *likes* and *retweets*, excluding *comments* which are often critical of the post and therefore are not a useful method of understanding popularity or impact.

5.0 Analysis

The preceding section detailed the research questions and methodology involved in this paper and this section provides the results of the analysis. As described above, the first stage involved categorizing similar images together and using composition, semiotic, and discourse analysis tools to evaluate the tweets. Consequently, this analysis is divided into *actors*, specifically the presence or absence of social actors such as Putin, Yulia and Sergei Skripal, and both Russian and British officials. Next, the *event* focuses on visual representations of Salisbury and Porton Down and includes the category of time pressure. While this could feature in the *message* category, it was categorized with the event as it is specific to the poisonings rather than the peripheral political context. Finally, the *message* category encompasses representations of the British media and British public support for the Russian Embassy. Alongside the categories outlined are relevant, salient tweets totalling 101 while complete data sets of tweets can be accessed in Appendices C–L.

5.1 Actors

Social actors are one of the fundamental analytical features of content and discourse analysis. How social actors are represented, or not, can be socially and politically significant as this often complies with the goals, narratives, and ideology of the producer (Van Leeuwen, 1996). This section first presents the absence of key social actors, namely Putin and the two suspects of the Skripal poisoning, followed by a discussion on those who are visible, namely the Skripals and politicians from the UK and Russia.

5.1.1 Putin – Missing in Action

On the Rusemb-London's Twitter account, there are only four images of Putin (1,2,4,5) during the period analysed, with an additional textual mention alongside an image of the two suspects (3). Although visual content should dictate the categorization, as Image 3 is part of a set and included an apparent citation from Putin, it was included in Table 1 below:

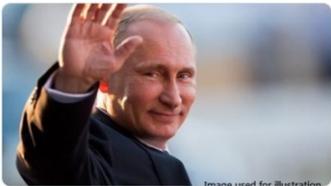
<p>1</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 5, 2018 Putin: Russian citizens accused of "meddling" in US never acted on behalf of authorities. But US is most welcome to present any evidence for consideration in Russia.</p>  <p>24 55 122</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 26, 2018 Putin on UK claims on Salisbury poisoning: if a "military grade nerve agent" is used, then the victims die immediately, right on the spot.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 53 213 365</p>	
<p>3</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 1/3 Putin: We have identified the individuals UK claims to be suspects.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 43 95 93</p> <p>** Co-text only **</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 2/3 Putin: they are private individuals.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 25 60 62</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 3/3 Putin: I call on them to appear before the media and tell their story.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 68 85 104</p>

Table 30: Putin (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Three of the four images of Putin are of him alone. In Image 1 and 4 his facial expressions seem jovial, even waving to the camera and hoping for “cooperation” (1) with a faint smile (4) and dressed professionally. Thus, all display standard features of diplomatic protocol in terms of dress, behaviour, and location, and facilitate the framing of state diplomacy (Constantinou, 2018: 108). He is centered in these three images, presented in an official context (4,5), and in front of a blue background with a Russian flag behind him (4) indicating a semiotic display of politics, as he is speaking on behalf of the nation (Manor and Crilley, 2018: 381).

While initially unremarkable, Image 2 becomes more salient with the identification of the other man in the image. Here, Putin is joined by He Ping, the Editor-in-Chief of the Chinese Xinhua media organization during an interview on May 25th, 2018 at the Economic Forum in Saint Petersburg. Identified as “The World’s Biggest Propaganda Agency” (rsf.org, 2016), Xinhua has subsequently “evolved from a sole propaganda machine to a multipurposed service, including news, information, entertainment, and expression of public opinions...” and provides information to multiple government sources (Tang and Iyengar, 2010: 128).

At the conference pictured here, when asked about Skripal, Putin first expressed thanks to God that the Skripals were safe and healthy, and then rejected British accusations, “I

believe it would be wrong to say that it was a chemical warfare agent. If so, everything the British side has said can be called into question” (Putin, cited in en.kremlin.ru, 2018). Putin also used the opportunity to advocate for either a joint investigation or to “stop talking about it because it will only worsen our relations” (Putin, cited in en.kremlin.ru, 2018). Images of Putin are rare in this corpus, and the combination of an image of him with the editor of the largest “propaganda” outlet, with co-text about the type of nerve agent used in Salisbury perhaps serves to strategically visualize support from alternative international partners as tension increases between Russia and the West as well as giving a clear indication of how the event would be reported in partner media environments. Textually, the captions present less controversial content and are used to distance the government from the poisonings, specifically through arguing that the suspicious Russian citizens were not acting on behalf of the government (1) and are “private individuals” (4). When quoting Putin, it is done so indirectly, although this may be more representative of the platform than traditional media quotations. In these indirect quotes, an *us vs them* narrative is used within Russia as “*We* have identified *the individuals...*” (3) “*they* are private...” (4) and *I* call on *them...* to tell *their* story” (5). The use of these referential strategies, how group membership is categorized, for example through us / them binary markers, or how actors are named (Van Dijk, 1991: 138), justify how actors are collectively grouped, (Khosravini, 2010). It is unusual for ingroup members to be discussed in an outgroup manner as this is typically used to express “attitudinal positions” and opinions against another group (Van Dijk, 1991: 138). Arguably, it is lexically challenging to report Putin’s language without using *we* or *I* and therefore this feature is less salient, yet the distancing between the government and the agents identified in the photo and the infrequency with which Putin is represented do suggest an attempt to disconnect the two entities.

5.1.2 The Suspects

Crimes need perpetrators. Yet, as in the case with Putin, the content which is absent here is perhaps more salient than that which is present. Therefore, it should be noted how infrequently images of the two identified suspects appear on the Rusemb-London Twitter account (6,7):

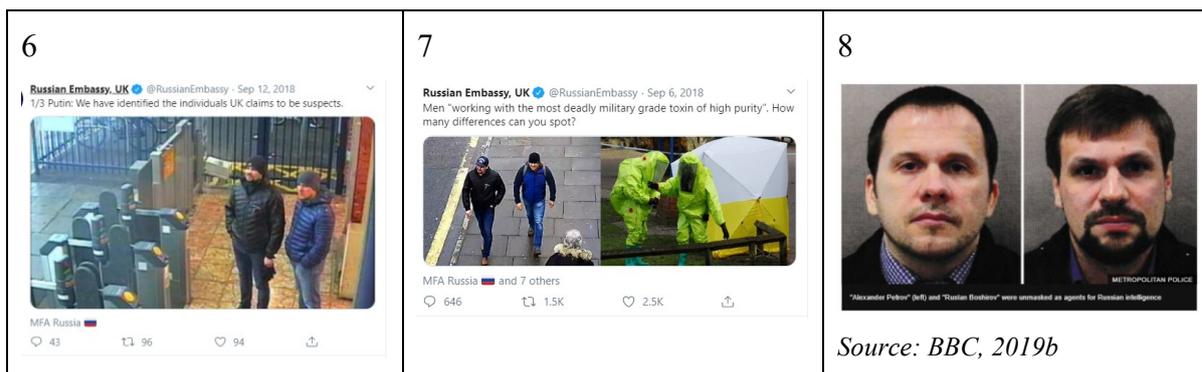


Table 31: Suspects in Salisbury (Image 6,7: (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>))

In the composition of the two images (6,7) the suspects are shown at a distance. Descriptive details are challenging as both wear dark clothes, hats, and their faces are difficult to identify clearly. Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov are not named, and simply referred to as private citizens (4), individuals (6) or “men” (7), increasing the ambiguity over their identity.

While these images were not created by the Rusemb-London, their selection over other available images, and their infrequency, is perhaps strategic. In particular, the strategic selection of these photos is clear when compared to image 8 from the BBC, which undoubtedly displays the suspect’s faces akin to a mugshot (BBC, 2019b). There is one month separating the two types of images, where the Rusemb-London uses images from September and the BBC from October. Yet, while Western media continued to use the mugshot-like images of two Russian nationals which can affect public perceptions of guilt (Jones and Warlde, 2008), the Rusemb-London did not use any further images of the suspects during the time analyzed here. By using images which obscure their faces, generic reference markers, and limiting the number of their images, the Russian suspects are literally “removed from the picture” creating a vacuum for alternative possibilities and replacing answers with questions.

5.1.3 The Skripals: Sergei the Traitor and Our Yulia

In the Skripal poisoning, the Skripals’ themselves are key social actors, yet their representations in the Rusemb-London tweets are quite different, as compositional variation between Yulia and Sergei Skripal is immediately clear. Images of Sergei frequently portray him as a criminal, behind bars (9,10,11) or captured by security cameras (Appendix D), while images of Yulia show a healthy young woman, often smiling, and

looking directly at the camera. The juxtaposition of Yulia as outside and free with Sergei who is caged and restricted is visible in many tweets, in particular (11) which shows both in a split screen image:

<p>9</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 10, 2018</p> <p>What a coincidence! Both Litvinenko and Skripal worked for Mi6. Berezovsky and Perepilichny were linked to UK special services. Investigation details classified on grounds of national security.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>263 489 494</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 24, 2018</p> <p>Kremlin spokesman says there was no letter from Sergei Skripal to President Putin to allow him to come back to Russia</p>  <p>14 41 56</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 4, 2018</p> <p>Six months in isolation: Russia demands that UK stops violating intl law and human rights of Sergei and Yulia #Skripal. rusemb.org.uk/fnapi/6643</p>  <p>Home Office and 9 others</p> <p>89 242 294</p>
<p>12</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 30, 2018</p> <p>Good news as Yulia Skripal is reported as recovering well. We insist on the right to see her, in accordance with the 1968 Consular Convention.</p>  <p>1.3K 951 1.5K</p>	<p>13</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 10, 2018</p> <p>We are genuinely happy for Yulia Skripal and wish her a further recovery and rehabilitation. We pay tribute to the professionalism of NHS staff. At the same time, media reports that Yulia has left hospital for a "secure location" cause concern. Read: rusemb.org.uk/fnapi/6472</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>78 141 217</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 23, 2018</p> <p>Glad to have seen Yulia Skripal alive and well. But the video shown only strengthens our concerns that she could be held against her own will and speaking under pressure. rusemb.org.uk/fnapi/6539</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>238 525 726</p>

Table 32: Skripals (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

This representation also reflects the domestic tension surrounding Sergei who takes on semiotically negative connotations of a traitor to his people (9) who is not welcome in Russia (10). Putin himself has been quite definitive on his position towards traitors, warning defectors that they will be punished, “traitors will kick the bucket”, and had previously called Sergei Skripal a “scumbag” and “traitor to the motherland” who was not the innocent victim that the West was portraying (Roth, 2018). This makes the representation of Sergei challenging for Russian media as, despite being at the center of the event, it is not possible to use him to justify an extended *Russkiy Mir* narrative to protect Russian citizens. Attention therefore shifts to Yulia, who can be portrayed as an innocent victim and a Russian national under threat (Harding, 2018), thus able to carry the *Russkiy Mir* narrative.

Textually, Sergei Skripal is also presented as a traitor through affiliation with other traitors such as Litvinenko and Berezovsky, who worked for intelligence services in the West. This again mirrors the difference in images between presentations of the Skripals, as the co-text discusses happiness and concern connected to Yulia:

Sergei	
9	<i>...Both Litvienenko and Skripal worked for MI6. Berezovsky and Perepilichny were linked to the UK special services...</i>
10	<i>...there was no letter from Sergei Skripal to President Putin to allow him to come back to Russia.</i>
Yulia	
12	<i>Good news as Yulia Skripal is reported as recovering well. We insist on the right to see her, in accordance with the 1968 Consular Convention</i>
13	<i>We are genuinely happy for Yulia Skripal and wish her a further recovery and rehabilitation.</i>
14	<i>Glad to have seen Yulia Skripal alive and well. But the video shown only strengthens our concerns that she could be held against her own will and speaking under pressure.</i>
16	<i>So far not a single post-4 March photo of Sergei and Yulia Skripal has emerged. This lack of transparency is here for a reason, and this reason is highly likely not protecting the Russian citizens</i>

Table 33: Textual Representations of Yulia and Sergei (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>) (Italics added)

The framing of Yulia, and eventually Sergei, moves from being positive and supportive to negative, as concerns that the Skripals are being isolated and held against their will becomes more visible (with a stronger focus on Yulia) and is also picked up by RT which used this framing from official sources (Chatterje-Doody, cited in Yablokov and Chatterje-Doody 2020: 21:03, 22:31). Through the combination of official sources such as the Rusemb-London and Russian media such as RT, this narrative also gains endorsement and consistency (Warlde and Derakhshan, 2017).

As Yulia is represented as a Russian citizen, this allows her to be more broadly framed as in need of Russian diplomatic help and consequently highlights the *Russkiy Mir* narrative, or the need to protect Russians abroad from perceived threats. Images in this framing show wider compositional variety yet semiotically feature representations of Yulia as being forcefully disappeared or held hostage, either by being pictured as trapped by barbed wire indicating an inability to escape from a prison (15), as a missing person (16) and forced by the UK government to confirm its version of events (17). Tactically, these images highlight the use of ‘distraction’ tactic from Nimmo’s (2015) categorizations by casting doubt and seeding conspiracy (Nimmo, 2015):

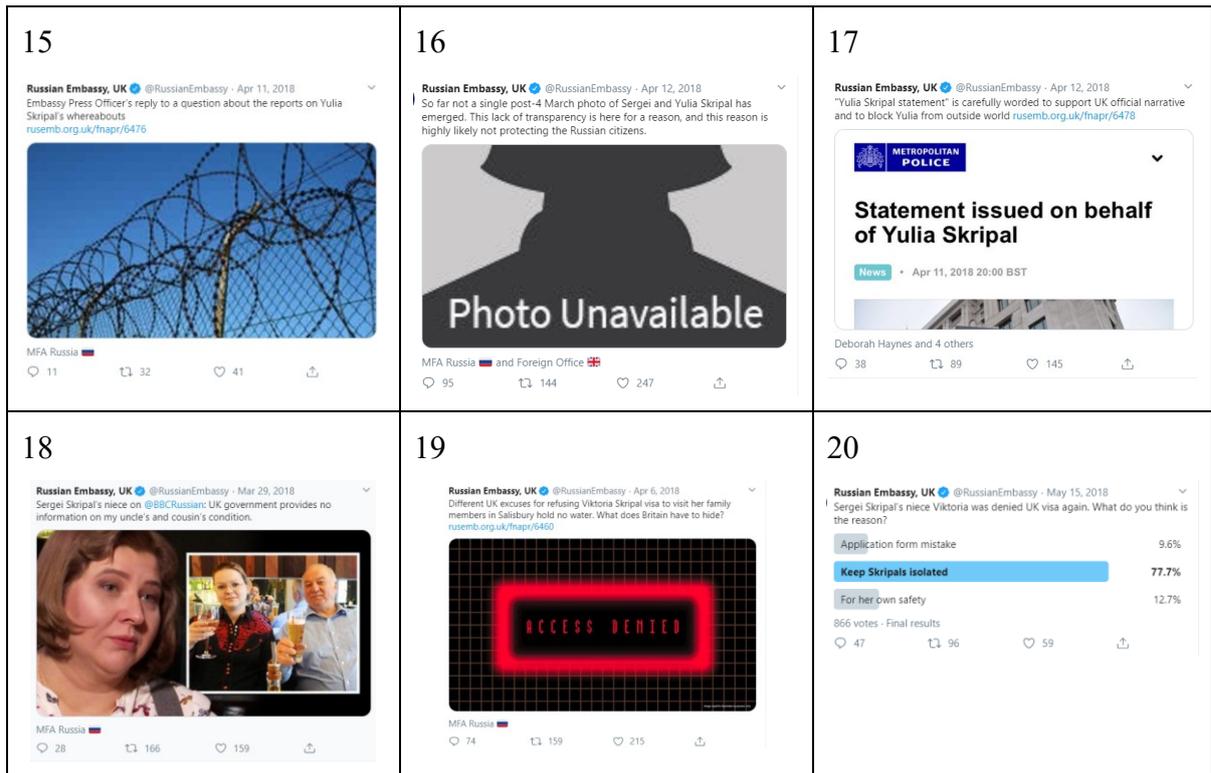


Table 34: Yulia the Hostage (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

This is further reinforced by the additional appearance of Viktoria Skripal. As Yulia’s cousin, the use of family adds a strong, emotive cultural reference to the hostage narrative. Image 18 shows Viktoria herself, the photo is a close-up, and it is possible to make out her concerned facial expression as she looks towards the superimposed image of her missing relatives. The next connection to this framing is the clear “access denied” symbol (19) on a black background with red lettering as a warning and indicates the official rejection of her visa application. Finally, a public opinion poll (20), shows that 77.7% (of 866 votes) of the Embassy’s audience believe this hostage narrative. In terms of power relations, this seems to present strong evidence that the UK state is at fault and helpless Russian victims and their families are bearing the burden of British negligence and heartlessness.

Due to this framing the Rusemb-London Twitter page, was forced to react when Yulia released a statement on April 11, 2018 (Greenfield and Bannock, 2018) followed by a video statement on May 23, 2018, rejecting help from the Russian Embassy in London “at the moment” stating that “no one speaks for me or for my father but ourselves” (Barry, 2018). Publicly declining help forced the content producers to adapt to the new information, demonstrated by the cessation of this framing with only Image 20 referencing this following the release of Yulia’s statement. The direct challenge to the hostage/family

framing can be found in Yulia's statement where she wrote "I thank my cousin Viktoria for her concern for us but ask that she does not visit me or try to contact me for the time being. Her opinions and assertions are not mine and they are not my father's" (Greenfield and Bannock, 2018). Although one more tweet uses Viktoria Skripal (20), framing shifts towards the government being untrustworthy, potentially indicating a useful countermeasure where direct rejection of a framing causes a need for a reactive shift.

5.1.4 Politicians: Questions and Answers

In terms of politicians, images focus specifically on UK Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, while on the Russian side, images focus on Ambassador Alexander Vladimirovich Yakovenko and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Maria Zakharova.

In the Russian case, the representation of the two actors differs. Yakovenko is usually featured dressed professionally in a suit, answering questions inside the Rusemb-London at a podium, to a group of professionals (21), giving a personal interview to the *@journalupdate* reporter from the Salisbury Journal twitter account (22) or being interviewed on RT (23). Zakharova is always presented alone, standing behind a podium. Unlike Yakovenko who is always wearing suits, Zakharova presents a more feminine image wearing pastel sweaters and jewelry:

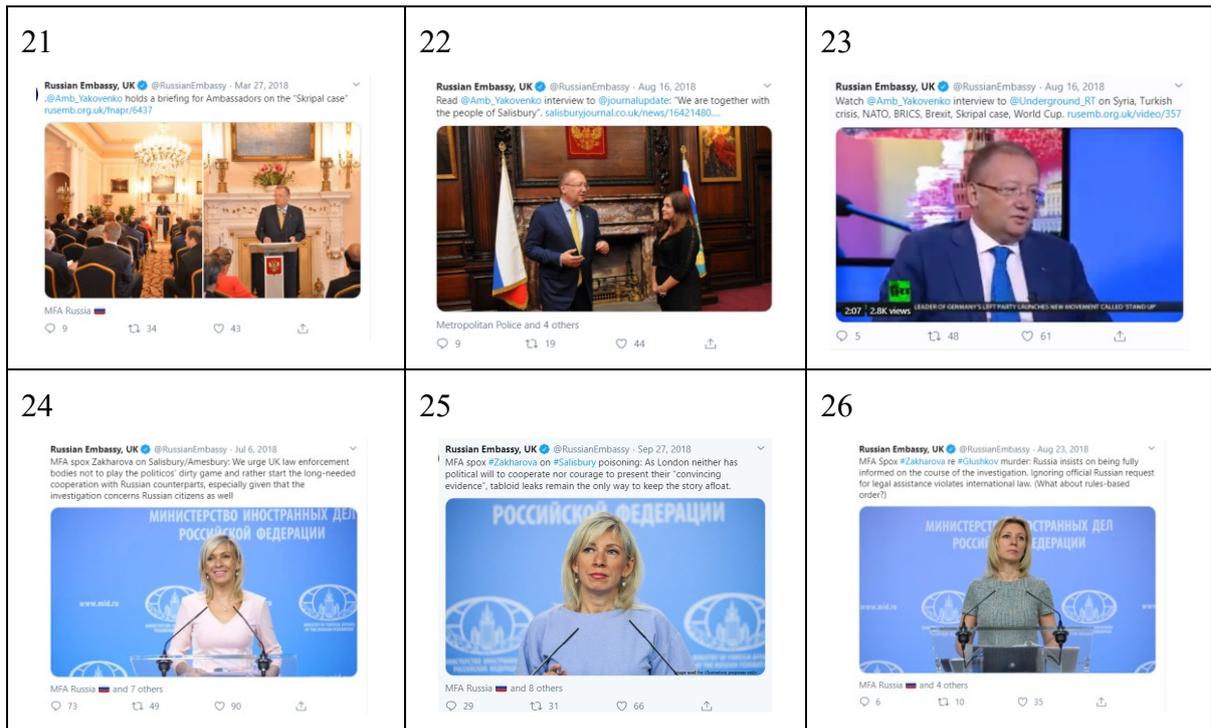


Table 35: Russian Politicians (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Both stand with images representing the Russian nation, and thus speak for the nation. In the Embassy (21), Yakovenko stands at the head of the room at a podium with the Russian coat of arms. Zakharova is always in front of the “Russian Federation” background, generally looking serious about the content being discussed (24,25,26). In terms of discourse, those who represent the Russian people and government are presented as providing answers and asking for international cooperation and evidence, and particularly framed as attempting to engage with the local community. Image 22 for example contains the caption “We are together with the People of Salisbury” and provides a link to the local news.

Textually, a significant amount of intertextual referencing occurs in the co-text. In CDA, intertextuality refers to the integration of additional voices or references from outside the primary event and demonstrates the interconnected nature of events and spread of media coverage (Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 1996). In the tweets analysed here, the Skripal poisoning is often combined with other salient security conflicts in Russian foreign policy. Two of the most frequently used events are the suspicious murder of Nikolai Glushkov, a Russian dissident and prominent critic of Putin, on March 12, 2018 at his UK home (Harding, 2019), and the suspected use of chemical weapons on civilians by Russian-backed Syrian forces. The latter was denied by Russia, and evidence such as video footage

of the attacks was dismissed as being staged (BBC, 2017). These events have clear parallels with the Skripal case, the former due to the assassination of a dissident on British soil, the latter regarding the use of chemical weapons. Thus, narrative linking is utilized as they can be framed “in a much more kind of reactive threat-based way” (Yablokov and Chatterly-Doodly, 2020: 25:15) and can borrow from another to validate claims (Berry and Sobieraj, 2012: 11).

Other Russian officials are represented, for example Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, yet not as frequently as Yakovenko or Zakharova. Lavrov is always pictured with a Russian flag, again speaking for the nation:

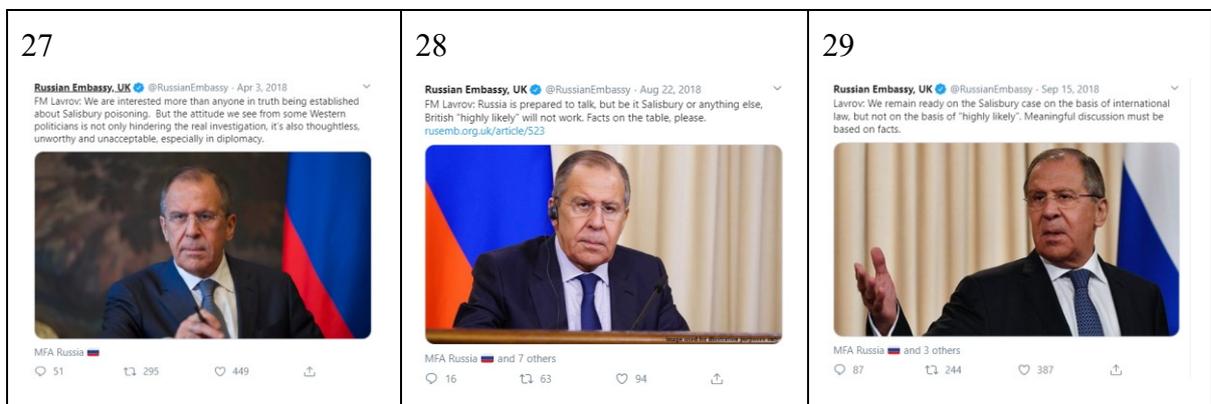


Table 36: Lavrov "Highly Likely" (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Co-texts around the images of Lavrov are also more aggressive than those connected with either Yakovenko or Zakharova, demanding facts, arguing that “Western politicians” are hindering the real investigation (27) and evoking the “highly likely” phrase (28,29) to “mock both the British investigation and the phrase”, and demonstrates how humour has been effectively used to undermine UK officials (Robinson, 2018). This dismissing tactic was not limited to the “highly likely” statement but expanded to include well-known cultural associations to “ridicule British allegations of Russian involvement in the poisoning which they denounce as unfounded” (Robinson, 2018):



Table 37: Lack of Evidence Sarcasm (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

The use of Poirot, a fictional Belgian detective, to mock the British government was highlighted by British MPs who accused the Rusemb-London of trolling (Tapsfield, 2018). Although the use of satire on the Twitter page may have been effective to some audiences, it also allowed the British government to accuse the Rusemb-London of making light of a serious event that concerned the British public: “There’s three people seriously ill in hospital, hundreds worried they may have been contaminated and international concern about what may happen next. The Russian embassy responds like this... #nowords” (Creasy, cited in Tapsfield, 2018). The use of “highly likely” filtered from Lavrov to the Embassy and made use of satire to troll the British government, adding to other examples of “trolling” by the Rusemb-London discussed in Section 2.2. However, in the discussion of discourse and power, it represents an interesting shift in public diplomacy where both embassies and MPs use social media platforms to “do” politics outside of any traditional diplomatic arena.

In terms of British Politicians, visually there was a great deal of standardization, and images of politicians are focused on Theresa May and the then-Foreign Minister Boris Johnson. Although other officials were represented in the data, they seldom comprised more than one example and were not as visually salient as May and Johnson. May is represented in the British Parliament, many images specifically taken from her March 12, 2018 statement when she used the phrase “highly likely” to connect the Russia government to the Salisbury attack (Smour and Holden, 2018). The framing of May was relatively limited, seven images were tweeted in between March 13 – March 31 with one additional image on May 3 and another on Sept. 6. Johnson, unlike May, is shown in more locations and interestingly, multiple tweets place him in Russia. In tweet 36 and 37 images of Johnson in front of clear symbols of the Russian Federation, specifically Red Square (36) and the national flags of both the UK and Russia (37) are presented which might seek to evoke the idea of previous cooperation between the two countries and how the UK is now undermining this cooperation.

<p>32</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018</p> <p>FM Lavrov on good political manners: the times of colonialism are long gone</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Boris Johnson</p> <p>60 82 143</p>	<p>33</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 15, 2018</p> <p>Decision to break official contacts with Russia undermines UK standing in the world</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>155 153 276</p>	<p>34</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 27, 2018</p> <p>UK Government may say it's 'highly likely' or 'quite clear' that Russia is behind the Salisbury poisoning. But even if they were 'absolutely sure', they would have to show facts.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>148 339 567</p>
<p>35</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018</p> <p>Those calling for Russian diplomats' expulsion don't care about Global Britain and its diplomats in Moscow.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>181 244 331</p>	<p>36</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 16, 2018</p> <p>Embassy Press Officer's reply to a media question concerning the article by @BorisJohnson Johnson in @TheSun: UK continues to violate their international obligations. It's a new reality. rusemb.org.uk/fmap/6564</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>15 23 30</p>	<p>37</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 10, 2018</p> <p>@KremlinRussia_E spok Peskov: @BorisJohnson contribution to Russia-UK relations was rather limited; now that he is out Russia expects sensible explanations from London on Skripals affair</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>23 74 163</p>

Table 38: May and Johnson (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

It is difficult to remark on the significance of the individual officials' images in these tweets. In the case of May the images were specifically from a publicly available Parliamentary session and were widely used by the media. In the case of Johnson, although he may be portrayed with more 'dopey' facial expressions (37), this is not atypical of his representation in the British media, as even Johnson has described himself as: "beneath the carefully constructed veneer of a blithering buffoon, there lurks a blithering buffoon" (Johnson, cited in Stanage, 2009). Therefore, although the image compositions might appear significant, for example where a child-like Johnson is being guided by Lavrov's arm and bemused expression, these seem to rely on pre-existing representations of both May and Johnson and are perhaps employed strategically by the Embassy to amplify their framing, but were selected from well-established representations rather than created.

However, other images of Britain were created which frame the Skripal attack within a historical context, "talking about all of the crimes that the UK has committed on the world stage from the times of empire through to the invasion of Iraq and essentially drawing into question whether or not you can believe a British establishment account" (Chatterry-Doody, cited in Yablokov and Chatterry-Doody, 2020: 41:49). This is certainly visible in Table 10 below, which provides 3 examples of the juxtaposition of the current narrative with historical representations of events in order to suggest an identical interpretation from the

audience. Image 38 shows a split image of May and former PM Tony Blair from a time when the latter argued in support of the Iraq invasion, Image 39 shows a split image of Colin Powell giving (now known to be false) information on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and the perfume bottle claimed to have contained Novichok, and Image 40 argues that Churchill had himself used chemical weapons against Russia:



Table 39: British Comparisons (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Discursively, the texts surrounding these images vary considerably and more closely resemble the firehose of falsehood (Paul and Matthews, 2016), where numerous narratives are utilized to undermine the official response. However, there are still categories which draw from the narratives such as *Hypocrisy*: drawing parallels with historic wrongdoings, or using dismissing tactics by arguing there is a lack of evidence and dismaying tactics by threatening diplomats and the UK’s role in international politics:

Hypocrisy and Historical Wrongdoings	
32	...good political manners: <i>the times of colonialism are long gone</i>
36	UK continues to <i>violate their international obligations</i> . It’s a new reality
38	<i>I remember when another story of a high-ranking UK official making accusations about CW</i>
39	<i>#2003 style?</i>
40	<i>...British troops used chemical weapons in Russia during the civil war.</i>
Dismiss and Dismay	
33	Decision to break official contracts with Russia <i>undermines UK standing in the world</i>
34	<i>“highly likely” or “quite clear” ... But even if they were “absolutely sure” they would have to show facts</i>

35	Those calling for Russian diplomats’ expulsion <i>don’t care about Global Britain and its diplomats in Moscow</i>
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Table 40: Firehose of Falsehood co-texts (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>) (Italics added)

The examples in Table 11 above are only a sample of the images and tactics/strategies found in the co-text to the images of UK politicians while the full visual and textual representation can be found in Appendix E.

There is one further aspect of the framing of British representations highlighted in Table 11 which can be expanded on. Specifically, Image 36 uses the *Hypocrisy* narrative to argue that the UK is undermining international law by blocking Russian involvement and acting unilaterally. The frequency of this framing thus merits its own visual category as one of the dominant framings for the presentation of British actions. Compositionally, this category shows diversity but generally uses graphics rather than photographs highlighting the creation, not selection, element of this category. Semiotically, moral authority is evoked, using bible quotes (41) and “Elements of Ethics” (42), while visual representations of justice (42,44) and rights (43,46) evoke legal concepts. Legal arguments were stronger than moral, as visuals of “rights” and international law were more frequently used:

<p>41</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 1, 2018 Reputation matters. After declining Russia access to Russian nationals in UK, why should @foreignoffice expect other countries to satisfy similar British requests?</p> <p>MFA Russia and FCO travel advice 107 retweets, 172 replies, 299 likes</p>	<p>42</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 3, 2018 Russian @OPCW envoy: Russia will accept results of the OPCW Salisbury poisoning investigation only if Russian experts participate in it.</p> <p>MFA Russia and Russian Embassy in NL 41 retweets, 76 replies, 110 likes</p>	<p>43</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 14, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's reply to a question concerning violations of rights of Sergei and Yulia Skripal by the British authorities: UK continues to blatantly violate the rights of Sergei and Yulia Skripal</p> <p>MFA Russia 32 retweets, 40 replies, 52 likes</p>
<p>44</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 8, 2018 New legislation introduced to @UKParliament in the context of the Salisbury poisoning: arbitrary searches and detentions, now encouraged by law.</p> <p>MFA Russia 7 retweets, 15 replies, 12 likes</p>	<p>45</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 23, 2018 Unilateral actions, interference in other states' affairs, blatant pressure on others to the point of aggression against "misbehaving" countries is NOT a "rules-based international order", but violations of the UN Charter.</p> <p>Foreign Office and 8 others 8 retweets, 30 replies, 41 likes</p>	<p>46</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 11, 2018 Embassy's comment on the claims that the UK has complied with its international obligation under 'Consular Conventions</p> <p>MFA Russia 8 retweets, 47 replies, 56 likes</p>

Table 41: Moral and Legal violations (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Although the legality under international law is most focused on, which discursively draws attention to alleged *Hypocrisy* and serves to undermine democratic principles underpinning Western governments, Table 12 also demonstrates the evolution of framing and amalgamation, or narrative linking, of additional events (Berry and Sobieraj, 2012). While visually different, these all work within the same framing of British governmental *Hypocrisy* compared with Russian morality and legality, and furthermore exemplify the distort tactic by presenting a strategic interpretation of facts and evidence. The primary framing, that the UK is breaking international law, also juxtaposes the framing of Russia as internationally positive (47) and as an international leader cooperating with security, concerns the diplomatic community (48,49), and falls into Gorenburg’s (2019) *Bastion of Traditional Values* category:



Table 42: Russia's Positive Role (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Image 47, for example, combines the Skripal event “150 diplomats expelled” with positive framing in Syria “150,000 civilians left Eastern Ghouta to safety thanks to Russian diplomatic efforts” and demonstrates how visual images are used to interweave multiple events, defined by the co-text. By combining the positive image and argument on Syria, contrasting Russian and Western actions, then asking readers to “Compare and make conclusions” (47) the Embassy attempts to dismiss Western accusations of chemical weapons use in both Syria and Salisbury. Images 48 and 49 only convey a scene of diplomacy through the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons’ buildings](#) (OPCW) and UN Security Council, yet the co-texts construct the idea that Russia is cooperating and leading the security discussion by actively convening the emergency sessions and UN Security Council meetings on Salisbury. Discursively then, the framing is not only on British politicians as hypocritical and breaking international law, but also helps to frame Russia as working to restore it.

5.2 Event

The next category that features prominently in the visual content is the event, and specifically the location of the poisoning. Here, as with some of the social actor representations, images are likely restricted by production access and therefore it is not in the uniqueness of the images to the Twitter account nor their creation, but in the selection, frequency and co-text of the images where the event framing can be understood. There were three different sub-categories identified in the group, first the scene of the poisoning represented by images of Salisbury and Skripal's house, next the concept of time passing with case remaining unsolved, and finally the peripheral representations of "poisoning" including representations of the Porton Down Military Lab which also extends to the representation of poison.

5.2.1 Salisbury

In the data analysed, there are 41 images portraying Salisbury and the scene of the poisonings (Appendix G). Compositionally, these images generally contain the same features: police, yellow tape, investigators completely covered, blue tents, police cars and ambulances. While images of the Salisbury poisonings are frequent, the visual representation of the scene often merges with another suspicious poisoning, specifically Nikolay Glushkov (50,51,52). As with the tweets of chemical weapons use in Syria which were fused with Salisbury, the crime scenes of Glushkov and Skripal were likewise amalgamated and it is difficult to separate the two events without analysis of the co-text or visual knowledge of the two locations:



Table 43: *Glushkov or Skripal?* (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Discursively, there are further examples of crime amalgamation, for example: “... attempted murder of Yulia Skripal and murder of Nikolai Glushkov” (50). Here, attention is again drawn away from Sergei and focuses on Yulia as the victim, while other co-texts call for cooperation and procedure according to law (51,52). As can be seen in Table 14, the Glushkov murder can be conflated with the Skripal event and builds on the Russian government’s assertion of the need for justice for Russian citizens, strengthening the *Russkiy Mir* claims. These images also mark a less aggressive tone in the co-text from the Embassy in both positive terms “we **urge** the British authorities to **live up** to their obligations...” (51) and negative, “British authorities **continue to refuse to cooperate**, law enforcement agencies **unwilling to shed light** on this crime...” (52)(emphasis added). Potentially, the co-texts of crime scene images are marked with more sensitivity when Russian victims are mentioned compared to those directed at politicians and the law, where colonialism, arbitrary aggression, and legal violations were used. This echoes the softer, concerned tone surrounding Yulia in comparison to the suspicion and frustration in the co-text surrounding British politicians.

A second group in the visualization of the event is the clean-up crew featuring individuals dressed in full white suits with face covers. The workers appear almost apocalyptic, bringing a higher level of seriousness to the event, and with no recognisable individual features they become an extension of the British government. Semiotically then, they represent the reality of the poisoning and the seriousness of potential security and health issues surrounding the poisoning but also bring this apocalyptic atmosphere to the event:



Table 44: Tampering with Evidence (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Discursively, the co-text encourages the interpretation of these government employees not as health and safety workers, but as an arm of the British government attempting to destroy

evidence (53) confiscate evidence (54) or conceal evidence (55) and brings a conspiratorial element to the framing through distortion and distraction tactics.

In addition to “destroying the evidence” framing, the images also facilitate the idea that the UK is not being supported by allied countries. In this framing, the co-text presents the idea that the UK was in the minority over expelling Russian diplomats (56), that a Swiss lab had proved that the chemical was not Novichok from Russia, but a BZ toxin developed in the US and UK (57) and that German media had debunked the British argument that only Russia possessed Novichok (58):



Table 45: UK's Wavering Allies (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Discursively, the co-texts in Table 16 aim to create doubt on how much support Britain has in Europe and establish the possibility of a British-ordained attack in Salisbury instead of a Russian one. In Image 56, the ambiguity of a Russian-led briefing of “foreign diplomats,” where the “Overwhelming majority believe that any conclusions should follow evidence – UK in minority” could be framing the UK as isolated (in the minority) and rejecting evidence (conclusions should follow evidence). Additionally, contradictory findings by a Swiss Lab and German media further contribute to the isolation of the UK amongst European partners and recast the UK as a potential suspect. Counter action by the Swiss Lab identified in Image 57 and discussed further in Section 6.2 highlights how these claims were fabricated and are clear examples of disinformation.

Finally, the co-text of the poisoning scene continued many of the more frequent claims and uses of distorting - focusing on the political nature of the event (60), distracting – repeating the lack of evidence and unanswered questions (61), and dismissing – rejecting of any information which does not align with Russian government narratives (62):



Table 46: High Frequency Narratives (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

While demonstrating many of the narratives and tactics, it also demonstrates the repetition of key framing techniques and the crossing of co-text arguments and images.

A final example of the framing used to create suspicion, secrecy and doubt surrounding the images of the clean-up in Salisbury is provided by the only image where an individual's features can be distinguished through the protective gear. This individual, a member of the clean-up crew, is visualized front-on at eye level in full hazmat protective gear including a face mask and is unlike the other images as we can see their face and specifically eyes. This personification of the government clean-up member has been altered in the Rusemb-London's version of the image (63). Unlike the original image (63.1) which is an unaltered image from the poisoning scene, the image used by the Embassy has been washed in red. Although "literature on the 'emotive meanings' of colour is inconsistent", it is clear that colours are used to create an emotive reaction based on sensory and semiotic coding (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 269). In the image presented in Table 18, the original photograph taken at Salisbury has been modified to increase a perception of threat and danger through the use of a red wash. To further demonstrate the semiotic evocation of red with the apocalyptic threats, image 63.2 was taken from a 2020 blog discussing the COVID-19 pandemic:

<p>63</p> 	<p>63.1</p>  <p>Source: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images in Price and Ma (2018)</p>	<p>63.2</p>  <p>Source: Bereg-Kubani.ru (2020).</p>
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Table 47: Red = Danger (Image 63: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Image 63.2 was taken from a Russian blog, but it should be noted that the same image was used in the British media in connection to COVID-19 and is now most likely used as a stock image. Consequently, it is not the context but the composition of this image that is striking – specifically the personification of threat and danger. The transitivity of the image of danger further demonstrates the importance of co-text, which in the Embassy’s case provides space for Lavrov’s “highly likely” to focus on the British authorities as the source of threat: “...the involvement of UK intelligence services highly likely” (63). This image symptomizes much of the visualization of the event and actors at the scene. Particularly, that the British government and its actors are the true threat as they work to conceal, destroy, block, and manipulate genuine evidence for political self-preservation.

To accompany the more conspiratorial suggestions of the event tweets, a second visual category connected to the event can be identified, specifically representations of poison. Compositionally, images collected from Twitter demonstrate visual variety but connect through the framing of Porton Down, a Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DTSL) located in Salisbury, which is portrayed as a plausible alternative explanation for the source of Novichok and thus the British government’s role in poisoning the Skripals. More specifically, the images of Porton Down present animals (64) and humans (69) as test subjects and are emotive. The animals are caged, the rabbit with its head locked in some device, and a sad looking monkey in a cage (64), while Image 69 evokes a disturbing sensation as masked figures conduct experiments on a body-like form strapped to an upright object and unable to move. Image 65 visually represents vials, presumably of poisons, suggesting that the UK has plenty of options for chemical weapons, while Image 66 presents a deleted tweet from the UK Foreign Office claiming that Porton Down had verified that Novichok was produced in Russia. By questioning why the tweet had been

deleted, the Embassy was able to query whether Porton Down had actually verified this information or if deleting the tweet signaled that the information was incorrect. Finally, two aerial images of the facilities with poison symbols reinforce the potential for the production of chemical weapons (67,68):

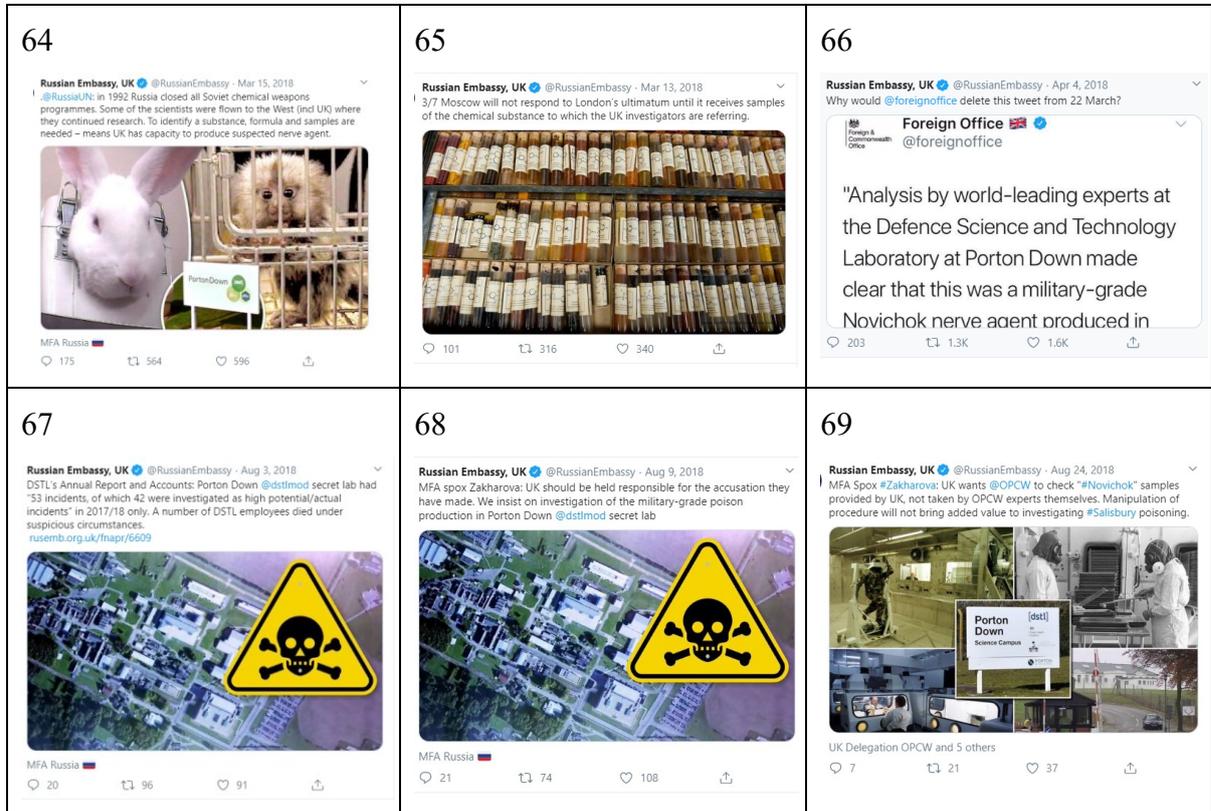


Table 48: Porton Down (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Although the composition of all images differ, they present semiotic framing that Porton Down is a secretive, dangerous place that had the capability to produce the chemical weapon used in Salisbury. Equally relevant in the semiotic discussion is that the Rusemb-London did not need to go far to find a potential alternative explanation. As the Laboratory is connected to the UK government in areas of national security, it had already been recognized that “myth and misconceptions” arose from the site and information outlining and explaining areas of suspicion had been published (Gov.uk, 2016). Unfortunately, these myths and misconceptions, or conspiracy theories, that were “floating around” (Yablokov and Chatterry-Doody, 2020: 19:02) could be redirected strategically on the Rusemb-London’s Twitter as a plausible alternative explanation, avoiding the need to create the framing as reproducing a pre-existing one was easy.

Textually, the arguments vary and often contradict each other, demonstrating the *firehose of falsehood* (Paul and Matthews, 2016) and post-ideological nature of information (Pomerantsev, 2015). For example, arguing that if the UK has the capacity to test for Novichok it can produce it (64) also cancels out their earlier argument that no comment would be given until a sample was provided to Moscow, presumably to test it, meaning that by their own logic, Russia has the capacity to produce it (69):

Directing Suspicion to Porton Down	
64	...in 1992 Russia closed all Soviet chemical weapons programs... <i>UK has capacity to produce suspected nerve agent.</i>
65	Moscow will not respond to <i>London's ultimatum</i> until it receives samples of the chemical substance...
67	...A number of <i>DSTL employees died under suspicious circumstances.</i>
68	We insist on the investigation of the <i>military-grade poison production</i> in Porton Down @dstlmod <i>secret lab</i>
69	Samples provided by UK, not taken by OPCW experts themselves. <i>Manipulation of procedure...</i>

Table 49: Text for Porton Down (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>) (Italics added)

Co-text arguments in Table 20 provide examples of UK Novichok production, UK pressure and manipulation, and more conspiratorial narratives of Porton Down employees' deaths.

Despite the variety of images and co-text, the category focusing on Porton Down and poison serves the purpose of creating plausible deniability through alternative explanations (Danyk, et al, 2017), and consequently becomes more conspiratorial. As pre-existing conspiracies are incorporated, language also becomes more aggressive and suggestions are more direct as opposed to other categories where suggesting and questioning are sufficient to create doubt over the British official explanations.

5.2.2 Time is of the Essence

A final category surrounding the event is "Time" which is frequently represented as a source of pressure and accountability from the Russian standpoint. While the images in this category do not show Salisbury, they provide a timeline from the event itself to the current

time as reminders of days passed since March 4th, 2018. The composition of these images is digital and therefore created by the Rusemb-London, generally focuses on large numbers, and often uses a red backdrop, in some cases accompanied by symbols representing poison (74). Repeating previous findings, the murder of Glushkov is again amalgamated with the Salisbury countdown, being visually constructed in the same manner (70,71). To further add to the blending of the Glushkov and Skripal case, the Rusemb-London’s website (rusemb.org.uk) features a tickertape in red recording how many days have passed since Salisbury and Glushkov, both followed by “no credible information or response from the British authorities” (76, 77):

<p>70</p>	<p>71</p>	<p>72</p>
<p>73</p>	<p>74</p>	<p>75</p>
<p>76</p>		
<p>77</p>		

Table 50: Time Since... (Images 70-75 (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>) / Images 76,77: <https://rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6570>, taken June 4th, 2020)

These images support the framing that the Russian government is asking questions which go unanswered by the British government and reminds readers of the quest for justice launched by the Rusemb-London. Categories in the co-text follow a stronger call to the political aspect of Salisbury as opposed to the more emotive and conspiratorial suggestions found in the co-text of the event images. Discursively, co-text alongside time is connected to legal obligations and a lack of evidence:

Time Textual References	
70	<i>15 days passed... UK hasn't complied with its obligation... to provide access to the Russian citizens and to the course of investigation</i>
72	<i>Russia has been waiting for answers and compliance from the British side all this time.</i>
73	<i>...expulsions and accusations – but no proof or suspects (2 months since Salisbury poisoning and still no suspects)</i>
74	<i>28 days passed... UK hasn't complied with its obligation... to provide access to the Russian citizens and to the course of investigation</i>
75	<i>...almost 3 months on: time has come for British authorities to apologize for the hollow accusations accompanied by an unprecedented anti-Russian campaign</i>

Table 51: Time Co-text Narratives (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

This repetition of time is also frequently visible in general images and videos across the entire timeframe of this analysis as a constant reminder that the Russian government is on the right side of international law, cooperative, and acting on behalf of its own citizens while the UK government hides, delays, and accuses others of actions it potentially played a significant role in.

5.3 The Message

5.3.1 British Media

A notable feature of the Rusemb-London's framing on the Twitter account is not only questioning the information presented by the British authorities, creating plausible deniability and an alternate possibility, but also slandering British media outlets reporting on the UK version of events. To do this, tactics of dismissing and distorting are required to

undermine the information and narratives of the British media and through extension, the UK government’s narrative.

The largest category of images in the representation of the British press were photographs of newspapers consisting of 50 tweets. Compositionally, these tweets are very similar with small variations in the visibility of the information. For example, fourteen photographs focus on headlines (78), ten photographs are “text heavy” and are consequently unreadable (79), and four focus on the newspapers’ title page (80):



Table 52: British Newspapers (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Semantically, the use of analogue images, specifically photographs, “are created through technologies that have a one-to-one correspondence to what they are recording” (Rose, 2016: 7). Unlike digital images, analogue images can be trusted more to represent what exists and are believed to be more truthful (Rose, 2016: 27). However, images in this category, while representing true media reports, are still very controlled. First, as headlines are designed to be emotive, engaging, and attention-grabbing (Beckett, 2015) they can also be discredited easily, as demonstrated in Image 78 where the co-text can argue that biased information found in reports “Sells better this way”. In the second example, while a significant amount of the text is presented, it is also too small to be read without significant effort. The effect, therefore, is a more truthful appearance – information is not controlled but available to be read, yet only the headline is easily readable (79). Finally, by visualizing specific newspapers, an attack on the British media is more clearly visualized. In this group, only *The Guardian* and *The Times* are visualized, but this also adds to further digital representations detailed below.

Textually, the narratives in the tweet’s co-text do not present significant variations from the narratives already discussed. For example, that the Rusemb-London is receiving significant support from the British public which is discussed further below (78), that the

British government, and not Yulia Skripal, wrote the messages she released (79) and that claims of unity and solidarity are inaccurate and colonial (80).

One of the larger categories of photographs of newspapers though offers selective images of content which are readable and do not necessarily focus on headlines but the articles (81,82,83), while a final salient smaller category offers underlined content to draw readers' attention to specific information in the photograph (84,85,86):

<p>81</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 29, 2018</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pick Russia as a threat 2. Invest in a media campaign 3. ????? 4. PROFIT! <p>Deborah Haynes Defence Editor</p> <p>The armed forces can expect an increase in funding in the autumn budget on top of an injection of £800 million that was announced yesterday, sources revealed last night.</p> <p>The development came as General Sir Nick Carter, the head of the army,</p> <p>MFA Russia and 3 others</p> <p>142 267 390</p>	<p>82</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018</p> <p>Another piece of #fakenews by @lukeharding1968: in reality, it was OPCW that said that BZ substance was added to the samples.</p> <p>None of this, the government says, changes the facts. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons confirmed novichok was used in Salisbury. Russia's identification of BZ was false - a "malign" and "craven" attempt to shift the blame elsewhere, according to the EU and</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>12 40 55</p>	<p>83</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 25, 2018</p> <p>So it was MI6 who benefited most from the Salisbury poisoning. How surprising.</p> <p>The Skripal effect...</p> <p>THE nerve agent attack on a Russian double-agent in Salisbury has sparked a surge in job applications, MI6 said yesterday. The agency revealed that "more highly motivated candidates" had come forward in the wake of the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in March. MI6's head of</p> <p>be identified, said the boost was predictable because of the extra publicity from the incident. "When we are in the public domain that raises our profile so inevitably that becomes an opportunity," she added. Miss Skripal, 33, broke her silence on Wednesday to tell of her shock at the assassination attempt that</p> <p>Daily Mail Online and 2 others</p> <p>64 197 328</p>
<p>84</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 31, 2018</p> <p>High risk jurisdiction? Yes, for those who have zero respect for international law.</p> <p>Whitehall sources made clear that this was a routine check for an inbound flight from a high risk jurisdiction country like Russia, and was not linked to the Salisbury investigation.</p> <p>MFA Russia and 2 others</p> <p>61 182 348</p>	<p>85</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 10, 2018</p> <p>In real world Russia has been officially offering assistance since March. Wonder why @thetimes bothers about it at all - they knew whom to blame from the start, no proof or due legal process needed.</p> <p>Though the intelligence assessment of the Salisbury attack is classified, it is clear the government has no doubt of its reliability. The Putin regime has refused to co-operate with the most basic of fact-finding missions. Mrs May's government sought agreement with Russia on independent verification by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Instead the Kremlin insisted on its own investigation, as if this — from a state that backs President Assad in Syria — would carry credibility.</p> <p>MFA Russia and Metropolitan Police</p> <p>30 203 335</p>	<p>86</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 20, 2018</p> <p>No they didn't. Care to apologize, @rogerboyes?</p> <p>The Kremlin has had 18 weeks to muddy the waters. Yesterday British investigators finally announced, to nobody's surprise, that Russians were indeed members of the hit squad that targeted Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia. Perhaps the delay</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>19 47 88</p>

Table 53: Focused Press (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

These images differ from the ones in Table 23 as there is more readable text provided, yet it is still controlled in terms of what is presented. Like the previous examples, clear details of the sources are often omitted from the co-text and images (83,84) or are partially provided with an author's name (81,82,85,86). In Images 84, 85, and 86, particular sentences have been underlined to draw the readers attention to specific information which is then directly contradicted in the co-text.

Discursively, the arguments presented in the co-texts fall into the well-established frames, for example *Russophobia* (81), Plausible deniability and conspiracies (82,83), international law and cooperation (84,85) or simply outright rejection of information (86). To take image 86 as an example, although the supposed author, @rogerboyes, is referred to in the co-text, the paper that the article shows is not referenced, and there are no details given in

the co-text. The specific underlined section: “Yesterday British investigators finally announced... “is rejected by the co-text “No they didn’t”. Exactly what the announcement the article refers to is not visible, and the reader sees a clear rejection of a statement in the British press but is unable to read the full article to understand what actually appeared in the article. The negated content does not seem to be aimed at important arguments in the Skripal event, rather it seems to provide an impression that everything that the British government claims can be negated to increase distrust and confusion (86).

A second category of British media images are represented compositionally through using digital images, specifically tweets (87) fake news images and citations (89), screenshots from news webpages (88,91,92), or well-known logos (90). Table 25 presents a sample of 6 of the 21 images which were categorized to represent the British digital media (Appendix J):

<p>87</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 16, 2018 Kremlin spox Peskov: shocking and unforgivable violation of diplomatic norms</p> <p>MFA Russia UK and 2 others</p>	<p>88</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 29, 2018 Details don't match in the "leaked" versions from 7 April and now.</p> <p>MFA Russia UK and 2 others</p>	<p>89</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 4, 2018 According to @guardian, "Russia has sent out a fresh invitation to @theresa_may" to visit the #WorldCup despite the UK "ministerial boycott". Read rusemb.org.uk/fnapi/6576 to see if it is true!</p> <p>MFA Russia UK and 2 others</p>
<p>90</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 4, 2018 On the "identification of suspects" in Salisbury poisoning: one could welcome some clarity in the case at last. Alas, @TheSun report is based on obscure sources and contains numerous caveats rusemb.org.uk/fnapi/6576</p> <p>MFA Russia UK and 2 others</p>	<p>91</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 28, 2018 @SkyNews Are face recognition experts also shown photos of Porton Down employees? rusemb.org.uk/fnapi/6641</p> <p>Home Office and 4 others</p>	<p>92</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 8, 2018 False: Russia is fully prepared to act once we receive a proper request with supporting evidence. Public insults not the best way to secure cooperation.</p> <p>MFA Russia UK and The Guardian</p>

Table 54: Don't Trust the Media (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Discursively, taking screenshots of tweets and online news articles, might be an attempt at digital direct quotes to portray a sense of accuracy yet also comply with the ideology of the publisher and the imagined audience (Van Leeuwen, 1996). What should be highlighted is that the major British media outlets are assimilated in visual and textual representation, much like the obscuring of sources in the print newspaper images. It is rare, for example,

for *The Sun*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The BBC* to all belong collectively together as they represent quite different standpoints on the political spectrum (Smith, 2017). By visually representing major UK news outlets together and critiquing the messages they all bring to the public, the British mainstream media can collectively be undermined. In the same way the use of chemical weapons in Syria and Salisbury can be merged to spread doubt from one to the other, grouping together British media can spread doubt from one to the other, and the visual collectivization can lead to collective dismissal. Information that the media reported is not opinion or editorials from the news sources themselves, rather they more frequently quote politicians directly (87), indirectly (92) or factually (90). For example, where *The Sun* (90) reports on the “identification of suspects,” yet the tweet gives no indication that *The Sun* passes judgement on the guilt of the suspects and instead is most likely relaying information from government sources or announcements. While it is clearly possible that a deeper reading of *The Sun* article would lead to more support for the Rusemb-London’s claim that this report was “based on obscure sources and contains numerous caveats” (90), the verification process to achieve deeper analysis is made difficult. Instead of directing readers to *The Sun* article, the tweet links to the Rusemb-London website where further details are given in an Embassy statement (Rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6576, 2018). Therefore, if one was curious as to the extent of the biased reporting, it is a three-step process through two Russian sources before the original article can be identified. This process not only makes verification of the original report more time-consuming; it also allows the Rusemb-London to repeat its message, thus strengthening its claims through consistency.

Finally, these tweets are visually “heavy” requiring more time to read and analyze. The co-text thus becomes a cognitive shortcut acting as an article headline. As headlines are designed to engage the reader by telling the key points of an article but are also designed to use emotional cues to “get your attention and to prolong your engagement” (Beckett, 2015) they potentially disguise details that are important in the body of the text. Guiding the readers to interpret the texts presented, the tweet co-text can act like “headlines” are used to discredit the information and show a limited picture of the original article. Undermining the media can therefore be accomplished by matching negative language with images of many British news sources, often with images of “fake news” while the specific reports are not meant to be read and analyzed, but simply collectively distrusted as bias or inaccurate.

5.3.2 “Dear Friends”: Public Support

Another salient category in the message content is the visualization of British public support for the Rusemb-London. Compositionally, the tweets were identical, depicting handwritten letters and typed emails from British supporters expressing solidarity with the Embassy and apologizing for their government’s actions (93-96). Each tweet in this category displayed segments of multiple messages, and while the entire letters are not visible, aspects of each are legible and express support for the Rusemb-London and dismay and distrust towards the UK government. References in the letters follow similar patterns of the strategic narratives already identified, and in particular of *Russophobia*: “this openly anti Russian stance by our political class” (94) “... the West has continuously **tried to discredit** Russia...” (96) and use the same narrative linking to external events, specifically connected to Syria (94,95,96) while also praising Putin as a great leader (96) and Russia as a noble country (94) (emphasis added). Also included in Table 26 below are two images demonstrating the Rusemb-London’s appreciation of UK public support (97) and a demonstration of the popularity of Russia in the UK (98) with a veiled threat concerning the financial impact that damaging UK-Russia relations will have:

<p>93</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Apr 19, 2018</p> <p>Russia's stance on Salisbury poisoning, and on Syria, obviously has support in the British public.</p> <p>63 124 269</p>	<p>94</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Apr 22, 2018</p> <p>Whatever devious political calculations were behind demonizing Russia and all things Russian in the public opinion, the plan doesn't seem to be working smoothly.</p> <p>81 215 459</p>	<p>95</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Apr 20, 2018</p> <p>We get letters from most diverse people, offering us words of support. Some are long-time friends; some are critical about other aspects of Russian policy. But all agree that recent developments are a dangerous absurdity.</p> <p>21 50 121</p>
<p>96</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Apr 24, 2018</p> <p>Dear friends, we do value your support. Truth will come out at last, lies do have short legs.</p> <p>56 141 353</p>	<p>97</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Mar 14, 2018</p> <p>We are getting some emails of hate and threat, but many more amazing letters of support. Thank you, friends!</p> <p>201 317 1K</p>	<p>98</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jun 18, 2018</p> <p>Receiving hundreds of requests for Russian flags from fans from around UK. Food for thought for British businesses (especially as we run out of stock)</p> <p>26 78 175</p>

Table 55: Public Support (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

The meaning behind these images perhaps aims to visualize public support in the UK and amplify the idea that the British government is not acting on behalf of the majority, as the majority instead supports Russia. As the nine visually and structurally identical tweets demonstrating UK public support were all published in April, specifically between the 19th and the 28th, this is more likely to be a reactionary framing in response to the expulsion of Russian diplomats, one of the more significant events of the political aftermath. This framing of popular support and amplification of division between the British people and the government could arguably signal populist rhetorical devices (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013: 499). However, as this is likely a reactionary strategy and not a repeated narrative, the use of populist rhetoric is not sustained and consequently not applicable to broader Russian framing of the Skripal poisoning.

Discursively, co-texts in these tweets again conflate multiple events, for example between Skripal and Syria (93), into a show of public support in response to the Skripal accusations and resulting diplomatic expulsions, by referring to the writers affectionally as “long-time friends” (95) or “Dear friends” (96), and touching upon strong narratives, such as *Russophobia* to describe political calculations designed to demonize Russia (94).

Alongside instrumentalizing public support for Russia visually, there are also further examples of engagement with the public through polls taken and presented on the Twitter account. Again, these tweets conflate multiple events, such as Glushkov’s murder (100), portray the UK officials as reckless and a danger to British national security (99) and reaffirm the notion of a conspiracy (101):

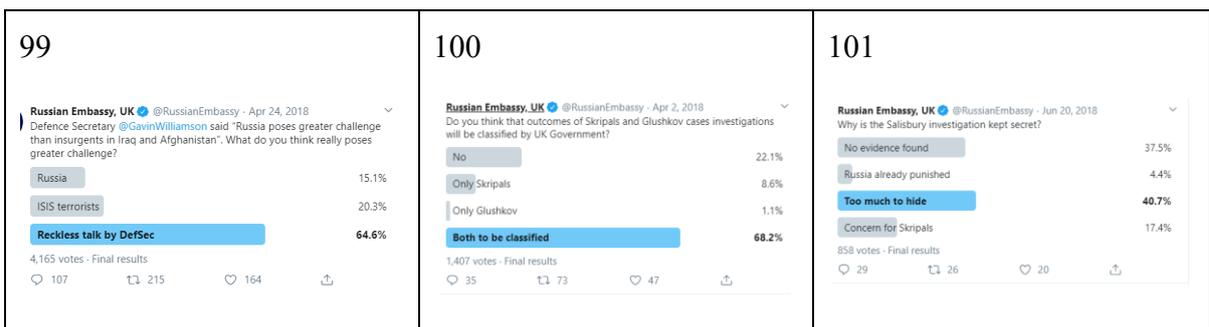


Table 56: Polling the People (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

Alongside presenting the polling percentages which support Russian state framing, these polls also present information about how many people participated. For example, 4,165 (99) which is by far the highest number recorded in this category, compared to 1,407 (100) and 858 (101), which arguably are not very high numbers for successful interaction. Yet

visualizing the polls as percentages instead of votes gives a stronger perception of impact. The actual participation for the “winning” option in each case is more accurately: 2690 votes (99), 959.5 (100) and 349 (101) and clearly does not represent significant engagement with these polls. Consequently, the framing of public support is stronger than the actual engagement with the polls, further demonstrated by the low engagement with the tweets (measured in likes and shares) 279 (99), 120 (100) and 46 (101). These also demonstrate how “pro-Russian” public support can be presented persuasively if one is arguing that a clear majority of people polled agree with the Rusemb-London’s framing when the reality shows that few people actually participated in this poll. Although this tactic is in no way unique to the Rusemb-London’s Twitter account, it does demonstrate how data visualization can effectively be used politically to “do ideological work” (Kennedy, 2020).

A final category in the use of images to convey messages is humour and sarcasm. This was identified by other authors (Buckley, 2017) as a major source of increasing popularity on the Rusemb-London’s Twitter page, it was expected that images and text capturing humour would be prolific and popular. Visually, the images in this category draw on popular culture, for example using James Bond (102) Poirot (104) or the Loch Ness monster (107), but also make use of cartoons (106) and photographs (103,105), thus showing a wide compositional range:

<p>102</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 11, 2018</p> <p>Does Russia's dialing code 007 make James Bond a "Russian spy"?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others</p> <p>108 303 646</p>	<p>103</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 14, 2018</p> <p>The temperature of relations drops to -21, but we are not afraid of cold weather.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>510 2K 3K</p>	<p>104</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 18, 2018</p> <p>In absence of evidence, we definitely need Poirot in Salisbury!</p>  <p>1.2K 2.3K 4.3K</p>
<p>105</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 6, 2018</p> <p>Men "working with the most deadly military grade toxin of high purity". How many differences can you spot?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 7 others</p> <p>646 1.5K 2.5K</p>	<p>106</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 7, 2018</p> <p>And these people are accusing us of laughing off a tragedy</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>20 36 90</p>	<p>107</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 20, 2018</p> <p>1/2 MFA spox #Zakharova: Salisbury poisoning has become a sort of Loch Ness monster. No one has seen any evidence, but people talk about it and faked "clues" appear regularly. Read the full text (in Russian): rus.rusemb.org.uk/lnapr/5518</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Hugo Rifkind</p> <p>51 70 119</p>

Table 57: Humour and Sarcasm (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

The line between humour, satire, and sarcasm is difficult to draw here, and is potentially dependent upon the predisposition of the individual reader. Nevertheless, while some may posts appear more aggressive with references to a return to Cold War politics (103), others are undoubtedly clever such as drawing a parallel between the 007 James Bond identification and the country dialing code for Russia (102) or using traditional mysteries such as the existence of the Loch Ness monster (107) as a metaphorical comparison.

As demonstrated by the interactions with these posts, quantified here as the sum of likes and retweets but excluding comments, the humorous posts were often quite successful. The most popular were the images posted on March 14th, 2018 of a thermometer with the co-text “The temperature of [British and Russian] relations drops to [minus 23] we are not afraid of cold weather” (103) where 23 is the number of diplomats expelled from the UK, and the tweet on March 18th of Poirot, a TV Detective based on a character from an Agatha Christie novel (104).

Table 28 also gives the three most referenced tweets in the Western media (102,103,104) which provided support for the claim that humour was successfully being used to increase popularity (Buckley, 2017; Robinson and Miltner, 2018). There is little doubt that these posts were popular, however if the category of humour/sarcasm is applied broadly, there are approximately 24 tweets which demonstrate attempts at using humour and sarcasm. Of this sample, only three reached over one thousand likes, with an additional three reaching over five hundred likes. More often, humorous tweets garnered minimal engagement.

Although it was speculated that humour is driving the Embassy popularity online, the tweets in this category did not demonstrate a salient engagement from the audience. Like all of the categories discussed in this analysis, some tweets demonstrated significant popularity while others received minimal engagement. While humour is undoubtedly interesting, and an official diplomatic mission openly mocking local politicians is unconventional, this likely represents a piece of a much larger picture which collectively works to reinforce particular Russian strategic representations of the Skripal poisoning.

This analysis aimed to categorize the salient representations from the corpus of 319 tweets collected on the Rusemb-London’s Twitter account through a visual content analysis to understand the Embassy’s framing of the Skripal poisonings. As demonstrated, there are a wide range of patterns, tactics and strategic narratives, lending credence to the idea of a Firehose of Falsehood (Paul and Matthews, 2016) which argues that the Russian strategy is

to throw out as many narratives as possible and see which ‘stick’. It is plausible to argue however, that there are clear repetitions of narratives which demonstrates attempts at particular strategic framing. There are also frequent repetitive linkages to other important Russian foreign policy events such as Russia’s actions in Syria or the unsolved Glushkov murder. Consequently, while demonstrating randomness there are also patterns which fall into narrative strategies. The following section seeks to use the results presented in this analysis to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this paper, as well as discuss some of the trends and patterns made visible through this analysis.

6.0 Discussion

Attempting to explain events in terms of grand narratives can often mean overlooking important details. Grand schemes to explain how politics works may forget to unearth the actual construction of events which build these broader narratives. Therefore, this paper aimed to deconstruct the visual and textual representations of the Salisbury poisoning from a set of 319 tweets on the Rusemb-London's Twitter account between March 4th and September 28th, 2018. The findings demonstrated a wide variety of framing which incorporated various tactics and narratives collectively aimed at undermining the British accusations that the Russian state was, in some way, behind the Skripal poisoning.

This section aims to combine the results of this analysis with the strategic narratives discussed in Section 3.2.1 to answer the research questions at the beginning of this paper. Specifically,

1. How can the images and discourse from the Russian Embassy London Twitter account be deconstructed through a visual content analysis to better understand representations of agents, events, and messages?
2. What can these frames demonstrate about the broader Russian strategic narratives in the media environment, specifically on the Rusemb-London's social media?

6.1 Actors

Visual content of social actors fell into three general categories, the Skripals, Russian officials and British officials. In the British context, this was expanded to US officials to amalgamate historical events of offensive Western action internationally, and effectively drew on the *Decaying West* strategic narrative. In the representations of the Skripals, there was more movement in the framing devices as images and tactics shifted in response to the changing information environment, for example in the use of Viktoria Skripal. There is also the frequent representation of Yulia as a more acceptable actor in the *Russkiy Mir* narrative than Sergei, the traitor.

The visibility of actors also highlighted the political framing away from key Russian actors. Hiding Putin and the two FSB officers is no doubt significant and has been repeated in the broader Russian context. Where events have clear negative ramifications for the Russian government, Putin is often removed from the picture, as demonstrated in this

analysis but also noted in other damaging events. In comparison with a more recent example, as Coronavirus cases increased in Russia, Putin has initially kept a low profile “delegating much of the responsibility for handling the crisis to regional officials”, (Politico.eu, 2020). While in 2020 this responsibility was passed to regional mayors and officials, in 2018 it passed to Ambassador Yakovenko and Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zakharova.

When set in the broader context, Putin cannot be associated with failure (Politico.eu, 2020) and the vague requests for private citizens to tell their side of the story offers little political guidance, perhaps even neutrality. The lack of visibility seems at odds with the scale of the situation but might demonstrate how the Kremlin generally views the conflict. As Putin is an excellent figurehead for positive stories and represents strength, by excluding him and distancing the President from the narrative, he is effectively untarnished by the possible negative associations with the event and subsequent evidence, which suggests that the Kremlin is aware of the negative implications and ramifications of the poisonings (Guterman, 2020).

The second key absence in the framing is of the two suspected assassins. Visually, the selection of photos demonstrates a preference for ones that obscure their faces, their names are not mentioned, and the frequency of visual or textual mentions is very low considering they are key actors. Thus, as noted in the analysis, you cannot have attribution if you do not have perpetrators, and instead of attempting to undermine the accusations directed towards these suspects, they are instead “disappeared” from the Embassy’s Twitter account. The vacuum created by this framing makes plausible deniability more plausible (Danyk, et al, 2017), and the event can be framed as a conspiracy from within the UK Government, as noted by a Moscow State University professor, “The thing is, it could have been the British. It could have been someone else...” (Manoilo, cited in Brown, 2018), or more vaguely as a Poirot-style murder mystery, like the Glushkov case.

When presenting the British representatives, framing was realigned to portray a political dispute between British and Russian politicians. Key UK politicians were framed as argumentative, secretive, or unhelpful while textually connecting them to narratives of Western hypocrisy and interference through Iraq, colonialism, or the Russian civil war. Textually, the patterns are erratic, clearly supporting the arguments suggesting a barrage of (often conflicting) narratives are tactically designed to overwhelm the information

environment. It also highlights that any possible angle of argumentation can be used strategically, from evoking Britain acting as an empire to a lack of evidence. Synthesizing image and texts together, the framing of British politicians arguably creates the perception of concealed intent to politically attack Russia by unscrupulous political leaders. This was combined with the argument that the British were undermining the international rule of law and helped create the framing of the British government as closed, guarded, and guilty of past crimes and current abuse of power.

This negative representation of British politicians can then provide a useful juxtaposition for the Russian politicians and political system. Specifically, this group is framed as actively and openly answering questions and asking logical, pertinent questions regarding the evidence used to tarnish their reputation. Additionally, they request that diplomatic and international law be upheld to support vulnerable Russian citizens abroad and take an active role in convening international security meetings, where they project a leadership role on the international stage.

The analysis also demonstrated the framing of Russian, as opposed to British, victims. British victims, specifically Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey and Charlie Rowley who received “grievous bodily harm” and Dawn Sturgess who died as a result of the poisoning (Pierce, 2018), were rarely mentioned. This is possibly due to a lack of emotional engagement from the Embassy audience towards the British victims, but more likely it was designed to disconnect the attack from having a British impact, and frame it instead as a political conflict. This was also realised through shifting the visual and textual focus onto Yulia Skripal, a better emotive and political strategic connection to the event.

It was unavoidable to include Sergei in the discussion, yet wherever possible it was Yulia, framed as a Russian abroad in need of help. For example, the Rusemb-London was not so keen on finding out where Sergei was, but frequently insinuated that family and friends were being blocked from interacting with Yulia. This was demonstrated in the use of Viktoria Skripal, a concerned cousin, who was desperate to reach out to her kin. The emotive, family narrative was used until a direct rebuttal from Yulia herself appeared. After letters and videos released by Yulia on April 11th and May 23rd, 2018 directly declined help from her kin and kinstate (Barry, 2018), the family concern framing was not as frequent on the Rusemb-London’s Twitter account.

While disappearing from the Embassy's Twitter account, the framing of Yulia as a victim, isolated and trapped by the UK government became useful in some domestic media. For example, on December 10th 2018, The Mirror published the article *Novichok victims Sergei and Yulia Skripal 'held against will at UK research lab'* where Viktoria Skripal was quoted directly claiming that the Skripals were being held and that the UK secret service had carried out the attack "to embarrass Vladimir Putin" (Viktoria Skripal quoted in McCahill and Aspinall, 2018). Yulia's May 2018 statement was only mentioned at the end of the article, where it was reported that "Yulia appeared to criticise limelight-grabbing Viktoria..." (McCahill and Aspinall, 2018).

This spread of a conspiratorial framing, from Russian officials such as Lavrov, Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov and the Rusemb-London (Ardehali, 2018) to domestic British media demonstrates a key issue when fighting disinformation narratives adopted by domestic press. Specifically, that a focus on prominent Russian officials also facilitated the uptake of the Russian narratives into the British media as "perhaps due to their elite status, claims made by these sources were also often covered extensively in UK media coverage of the incident" (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 23). Once in the British media, information designed to deceive can become protected under a perceived freedom of expression. In other words, when external, disinformation is easier to scrutinize and discredit, but when domestic outlets pick up the same framing and operate in local contexts, freedom of expression becomes a more significant barrier to action limiting disinformation and any crackdown on this information can be seen as censorship (Donovan, 2020).

The reversal in framing the identity of the victims as Russian, as opposed to UK citizens, was also key in sustaining the *Russophobia* narrative but potentially provided a greater opportunity for Russian involvement through the *Russkiy Mir* narrative. By focusing the framing on Yulia, a less controversial character and more clearly a Russian citizen, the Rusemb-London was able to argue that protection of Russian citizens extended beyond Russia's borders and most definitely extended to Yulia. The request for Russian involvement in the investigation was categorically rejected by the British government: "... you don't recruit an arsonist to put out a fire. You especially don't do that when the fire is one they caused" (Pierce, 2018), but this did not deter the Rusemb-London from

perpetually using the notion of being blocked from the Skripals and the investigation that they argue, by rights in international law, they should have been privy to.

In terms of strategic narratives, the framing of social actors facilitated the *Hypocrisy* narratives where Britain allegedly rejected international law to hold Russian victims as hostages in a political conflict and rejected calls for evidence to their claims of Russian involvement. This ran parallel to the *Russkiy Mir* narratives which used Yulia Skripal as a channel into the event through presenting her as a young, innocent, Russian victim in need of help. Removing British victims shifted focus to Yulia as the primary victim, which then fed into the framing of the poisonings as a political conflict between an aggressive UK and an open, helpful Russia. In this way, the framing of the UK as closed and Russia as open is built upon. The further disappearance of Putin separates the Russian government from the event, and the removal of the GRU officers facilitates plausible deniability where anyone, including the British government, could have attempted to murder the Skripals.

6.2 Event

While representations of social actors demonstrate a framing that focuses on the case as a political dispute and aim to undermine the British government and its claims, the tweets connected to the event itself demonstrate much stronger conspiratorial claims and significant narrative linkage between the chemical weapons attack in Salisbury with Syria, while also evoking other mysterious Russian deaths. In this way, plausible deniability was developed by creating an alternative possibility to the British claims, where the British government had attacked the Skripals with Novichok manufactured from Porton Down and were now actively destroying the evidence.

One of the most noted features in the visual representation of Salisbury was the blending with Glushkov and Syria. By conflating these different events together, negating, undermining, or disproving of one event can then be transferred onto the other, interconnected event. For example, arguing that there was no Russian chemical attack in Salisbury can blend into arguing that there was no chemical attack in Syria and vice versa. Claiming that the British government played a role in the Salisbury attacks, can then be used to imply that they also played a role in the Glushkov death. Undermining one side of the story thus transfers onto others and by conflating the framing, more doubt can be cast

over wider contexts and have serious ramifications for countering popular support for these alternative attacks.

The event framing also presents an alternative possibility of events, where British authorities destroy evidence and slow the investigation, and that the secretive lab at Porton Down produced Novichok. These portrayals create alternative options. Strategically, it is difficult to perpetually refute evidence to sustain plausible deniability, whereas creating alternative possibilities is potentially easier and evokes pre-existing vulnerabilities and suspicions. Consequently, it would seem that this aspect of the event projection is more conspiratorial in nature as it provides “fake facts for conspiracy theories to look more genuine” (Yablokov, cited in Yablokov and Chatterje-Dooty, 2020: 6:36) which are different from simply unverifiable speculation (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 31). In other words, “...it’s not unknown for the Russian Embassy accounts on Twitter to make quite interesting allegations which can then be reported completely factually by RT” (Chatteje-Dooty, cited in Yablokov and Chatteje-Dooty, 2020: 20:57). For example, the framing of Yulia as a hostage was initiated by the Rusemb-London and repeated by other Russian officials which allowed the Russian media such as RT to report factually on conspiracy theories as if they are factual and quote official sources to do so (Chatteje-Dooty, cited in Yablokov and Chatterje-Dooty, 2020: 35:35).

While this may be a deliberate attempt to create conspiracy fodder, other authors (Thomas, 2015) argue that this simply reflects a historical sensitivity and predisposition to see “conspiracies everywhere, whether real or fabricated” which extends beyond the political realm bringing a high level of anxiety to the population in general (Tomas, 2015: 19). Although this framing does not necessarily have all of the features of a full conspiracy theory, it could reflect intent or paranoia, and is not as conspiratorial as some other narratives found in RT or Sputnik’s reporting (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 32). However, the framing still features a secretive lab that manufactured a lethal weapon used by the government’s secret services on its own citizens, and thus should be interpreted as conspiratorial.

Indicative of this are two tweets on April 14th, 2018 claiming that the Swiss laboratory *Labor Spiez* had revealed an “unexpected discovery” (57), that the specific type of chemical used (in the Skripal case) shared no connection to Russia but was produced in the West. Despite having no factual grounding, the Rusemb-London’s claim that Novichok

was produced in the West could then support the conspiratorial claims that Porton Down or the British authorities had used chemical weapons on their citizens and is a clear example of how disinformation is used by official state sources.

Two days after this claim, initiated by Lavrov and reported on the Rusemb-London's Twitter, the Lab declined to comment on the claims, but did retweet an article where the head of the laboratory's chemistry department "said the UK's findings were credible and the British laboratory's reputation is 'indisputable'" (swissinfo.ch, 2018). No further tweets on this claim appeared after the Swiss Lab rejected the claims publicly. However, later in 2018, Swiss authorities confirmed that "Dutch authorities had arrested and expelled two suspected Russian spies this year after the two allegedly tried to hack a Swiss laboratory that conducts chemical weapons tests" (RFE/RL, 2018). The laboratory was the same one which had analyzed the Skripal samples, but also analyzes samples of suspected chemical weapons in Syria (BBC, 2019) and thus had potentially aimed to fabricate "factual" evidence to validate the official Russian claims.

While the Rusemb-London can act as a content creator of disinformation, it can also amplify pre-existing suspicions and distorted claims found in the British media (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 23). In this analysis, connections with the claim that British taxpayers would be required to pay for the Skripal house were first published in the British media (Kerbaj, 2018), and contributed to the conspiratorial Russian claims that the British government was controlling the property to destroy evidence at the crime scene. This provides an example of the distort tactic extracted from domestic media, as the Wiltshire Council had only stated that the owner of the property could sell the house to the council *or* put it up for sale privately (Wiltshire Police Federation, 2019). Of particular concern, after consultation with the local community, was that the location not be used as "a 'dark tourism' hot spot or turn[ed] into a museum", (Wiltshire Police Federation, 2019) nor used as a macabre Airbnb (RFE/RL, 2019). Additionally, according to a Radio Liberty report, the monetary compensation was not a government prediction but rather an estimate made by *The Sun* tabloid (RFE/RL, 2019).

The claims that taxpayers would be forced to pay for the contaminated locations because the government needed to control the properties was inaccurate, distorted, and facilitated the conspiratorial claims that the UK government was destroying evidence. The taxpayers' role was part of 54 images used to build the framing of the "clean-up" as an attempt to

suppress damaging information which pointed to the British government's involvement. This amplification of the British media's conspiratorial claims could thus be used by the Rusemb-London to factualize its own framing, that the British government was actively suppressing the truth and hiding their role: "All this makes us convinced that the poisoning of the Skripals is being deliberately classified by the British authorities, who are essentially denying the international community the opportunity to establish the truth of what really happened in Salisbury" (Rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6570).

In terms of strategic narratives, features of *Hypocrisy*, *Russophobia*, and *Decaying West*, including the *Bastion of Traditional Values* narrative (Gorenburg, 2019) were all present, alongside the clear tactical use of distortion tactics, where facts are inaccurately reported and dismay tactics where the British officials were constructed as the genuine threat to the public. However, while the features identified in this section can demonstrate strategic narratives and tactics, arguably there should be a differentiation between the framing of social actors to undermine the British narrative, and these framings and narratives, which create "facts" for conspiratorial claims. The claims that British officials were destroying evidence, buying Skripal's house, or that Novichok was created in the West, possibly by Porton Down, are easier to identify as disinformation in that they are factually incorrect. But they also demonstrate how these claims are not necessarily Russian inventions and were instead sourced locally and simply amplified by Russian media (Yablokov and Chatterje-Dooty, 2020).

Finally, in this category, the time pressure element was noted, which consistently reminded the audience of the number of days passed since the attack. This represents a vulnerability in the UK policy reactions to the poisoning. The UK's initial response was immediate in attribution, and demonstrated "robust political, diplomatic and law enforcement measures, coordinated with international partners" (Allan, 2018). However, the traditional British system of secrecy on sensitive issues allowed for a gap in the information environment which was subsequently exploited and filled in by the Russian narrative (Barry, cited in UCL, 2018: 19:09).

As Russian narratives took hold in public opinion, the UK was forced to reevaluate this tradition and "pushed them in the direction of more transparency" (Barry, cited in UCL, 2018: 20:49). The images of time and the pressure this framing brings then, is effectively exploiting the tradition of secrecy discussed by Barry, (cited in UCL, 2018) and highlights

how, despite quick initial attribution, being less active in domestic information spaces created a transparency issue that could easily be exploited as suspicious and lacking evidence for attribution. The emphasis of time in the event framing could easily be transformed into a lack of evidence and highlight the mismatch between British rhetoric and action (Allan, 2018) paving the way for *Russophobia* and *Hypocrisy* claims.

6.3 Message

The primary focus of the framing in the message category was to increase the distrust towards well-known domestic media and amplify the public support towards the Rusemb-London. Therefore, it was not specific to the event *per se*, but highlights the role of information warfare which is the perpetual degradation of institutional trust. The framing that a biased media should not be trusted is not unique to the Rusemb-London and was echoed in Russian media, such as RT and Sputnik, which collectively and symbiotically accused Western media of “inflaming public opinion against Russia or producing government propaganda” (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 27). Where media reports and sources relay UK government information or demonstrate suspicion towards the Russian state they are identified visually, for example, *The BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*. By collectivising the British media and dismissing the accuracy of their publications, using “fake news” images, only showing small segments of the original report, and textually discrediting them while providing no access to the original posts, the Rusemb-London is able to amplify the notion that the British media in general is biased and only seeks to incite tension between the two countries.

This type of framing also facilitated the Russian media’s claims that it is the source of genuine information which, contrary to the British media, is not afraid of asking the difficult questions (Pomerantsev, 2014). Even in some Western media, RT is projected as similar to the BBC, generally reporting “purely factual” content that while biased, only “borders on disinformation” when an event is significant in foreign policy (Hutchings and Tolz, 2020). This representation is damaging though, as Pomerantsev (2015), focusing on RT, argues that presenting an image of choice and simply questioning the dominant discourse by presenting alternative viewpoints “abuses the whole idea of journalism” (Pomerantsev cited in Eslas, 2015) which is to hold power to account without an agenda (Boaden, 2011). Therefore, the Embassy’s undermining of British media and narrative

connections between the Rusemb-London and Russian media outlets, all combined with the visual and textual symbiotic representation of the Rusemb-London on RT and RT on the Embassy, work to undermine the British media and amplify the Russian, while increasing disinformation features of endorsement and consistency to make them seem more genuine.

Next, the analysis highlighted the role of British public support in the tweets, specifically the use of letters of support and opinion polls. While this could indicate attempts at a populist framing as it uses the idea of the people against the elite (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013: 499), evidence suggests that it is more likely an attempt to amplify the framing that opinions of British action against Russia are divided, both domestically and internationally. This framing focuses on domestic fractions, demonstrating that British people support, trust, and believe the Russian government while distrusting their own. Yet this also supports the *Decaying West* narrative that European relationships are in danger and the UK did not act in unity with its allies. This framing, discussed in *Table 16: UK's wavering allies*, proposes that even within countries that show solidarity, many are reluctant to act over London's "weak and insufficient" evidence (Sputniknews.com, 2018). In both of these contexts, the framing seeks to expose the idea that the British government was manipulating both allies and citizens against Russia and that the projection of "unity" was instead a minority (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 28).

Finally in this section the question of humour and satire was discussed. Personally, this area had been what initially drew me to an analysis of the Rusemb-London's Twitter account as it was identified as a key factor in the account's popularity (Buckley, 2017). Although this is an interesting feature of the Twitter account, this analysis suggests that it was not more salient than the other categories identified in this analysis. If popularity is demonstrated in engagement, Table 29 demonstrates how popularity is spread throughout by identifying some tweets with over 500 likes and which cannot be placed clearly in any single category:

<p>12</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 30, 2018</p> <p>Good news as Yulia Skripal is reported as recovering well. We insist on the right to see her, in accordance with the 1968 Consular Convention.</p>  <p>1.3K 951 1.5K</p>	<p>34</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 27, 2018</p> <p>UK Government may say it's "highly likely" or "quite clear" that Russia is behind the Salisbury poisoning. But even if they were "absolutely sure", they would have to show facts.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 148 339 567</p>	<p>64</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 15, 2018</p> <p>@Russiackin, in 1992 Russia closed all Soviet chemical weapons programmes. Some of the scientists were flown to the West (incl UK) where they continued research. To identify a substance, formula and samples are needed – means UK has capacity to produce suspected nerve agent.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 175 564 596</p>
<p>66</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 4, 2018</p> <p>Why would @foreignoffice delete this tweet from 22 March?</p> <p>Foreign Office @foreignoffice</p> <p>"Analysis by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down made clear that this was a military-grade Novichok nerve agent produced in</p> <p>203 1.3K 1.6K</p>	<p>74</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 1, 2018</p> <p>28 days passed since the poisoning of Sergei & Yulia Skripal. UK hasn't complied with its obligation under the consular convention to provide access to the citizens and the course of investigation</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Foreign Office 159 640 907</p>	<p>88</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 14, 2018</p> <p>We are getting some emails of hate and threat, but many more amazing letters of support. Thank you, friends!</p>  <p>201 317 1K</p>

Table 58: Popularity (<https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy>)

In addition to popular, humorous tweets, positive messages about Yulia (12) and British public support (88) were visible, conspiratorial framings of Porton Down (64, 66) were popular, as well as time pressure (74) and Theresa May's "highly likely" (34). This is not to say that humorous or satirical tweets were not salient, only that the claim that this the main reason behind the account's popularity is difficult to verify without a more significant impact analysis.

More generally, in contrast to the framing and narratives used in the event category, which were conspiratorial and often clearly disinformation, framing and narratives in this category seemed simply to support pre-existing narratives. For example, the framing that the British media could not be trusted and was reporting information inaccurately facilitated the tactics of dismissing and distorting which helped the *Russophobia* narrative and potentially bolstered support for Russian state-backed media such as RT. The framing of British public support for the Rusemb-London and Russian government strengthened the claims that the British government was acting unilaterally, lacking information and logic, and acting against the will of its own people (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 27), all of which can fall into the *Decaying West* narrative. The use of humour to twist information

by mocking the investigation and British politicians, or to help to undermine the British claims falls into multiple narratives such as the *Decaying West*, or *Russophobia*.

Despite this, it is difficult to make clear, consistent paths connecting specific message framing to strategic narratives. As strategic narratives are often used to understand Russian discourse, particularly in areas of strategic disinformation, they are also broad. The use of *Russophobia* can cover many of the tweets discussed here, as can the *Russkiy Mir* or the *Decaying West* narrative. Consequently, it is clear that strategic narratives are extremely useful when attempting to understand general tendencies in Russian communication on salient, controversial events. Yet, they may be less useful when attempting to understand the specific construction of these narratives, namely, what is prioritised, what is popular, what is reactive and what is proactive. Likewise, the firehose of falsehoods (Paul and Matthews, 2016) is equally helpful when trying to understand the move away from traditional narrative structures and towards comprehending a barrage of inaccurate information, but less helpful when trying to understand and categorize the construction of framing. In this analysis, there were key strategic narratives and tactics seen which did follow patterns, yet not all of these fit clearly within particular strategic narratives, while many tweets drew on multiple narratives.

While some authors (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019: 27) simply present these new patterns as new strategic narratives, which are context specific. Considering these categories in terms of framing, however, has been more beneficial when trying to understand the building blocks of Russian narratives and discourse. Instead of having limitless possible narratives which can only complicate theory and amplify terminology – already an issue in this field - it is potentially more useful to identify key strategic narratives and then move deeper into the content to demonstrate how different framing works within these narratives to truly understand how information is instrumentalized. Understanding these building blocks as frames allows for this deeper investigation into the structures which hold these narratives. If strategic narratives are scenes, frames are the plot and the characters, and both are needed to fully understand the morals being directed at audiences. However, especially in the Russian context, these may not always align perfectly, nor are they designed to.

6.4 Changing Diplomatic Standards

In addition to the research questions discussed above, other areas of importance became relevant in the analysis. One such area is how a lack of consequences on Twitter has provided safe space for political propaganda from diplomatic sources. For example, while RT was fined £200,000 for failing to comply with British broadcasting rules, particularly on impartiality (ofcom.org.uk, 2019), no similar body can regulate content on the Rusemb-London's Twitter account. While Twitter has recently hidden tweets from US President Trump which glorify violence, disinformation is still far from being an area of focus on the social media site (BBC, 2020), let alone an official Embassy account.

This analysis also supports many of the other discussions on Russian online disinformation. Selectively amplifying specific framings from the local British context demonstrates how the Russian media is not the creator of all disinformation. That British media amplify particular Russian narratives, even after they stopped appearing on the Embassy's Twitter account, also demonstrates vulnerabilities in the domestic media. For example, an article published by *The Times* on June 24th, presented a headline stating, "Salisbury spy poisoning: Taxpayers **foot bill** for Sergei Skripal's contaminated home" (Kerbaj, 2018) (emphasis mine).

This headline inaccurately presents the information as a fact instead of a possibility as the article itself later highlights that "Skripal's home **is expected to be bought...**" was "**likely to cost...**" (Kerbaj, 2018) (emphasis mine). This was picked up by RT which reported on the 24th June: "Taxpayers **will be** footing the bill for Skripal's home, which is expected to be bought by the UK government for around £350,000 (US\$464,000), **The Sunday Times** reported, citing Whitehall officials." (RT, 2018) (emphasis mine). The Rusemb-London could then amplify this narrative on the 28th "Media reports houses... **to be purchased** by UK authorities" (54) (emphasis mine). Technically, this claim by the Rusemb-London was completely accurate as British media had reported the purchase as a fact and demonstrates how British media, bound to news values of entertainment (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001), can facilitate, potentially knowingly, divisions in the domestic media environment that can easily be amplified for political purposes by foreign governments.

Conclusion

Perhaps if we all had actually stopped talking about it, like Putin suggested, the relationship between Russia and the UK would not have been as problematic after March 4th, 2018. Status quo in the financial and political relationship in this way was indeed how the relationship had been conducted previously. Russian state actions were not decisively acted on by the British Conservative-led government until Theresa May stood up in the British Parliament and declared that it was ‘highly likely’ that the chemical weapons attack had a Russian state hand in it. The Skripal poisonings therefore marked an important event in the relationship between Russia and the UK.

While the disinformation campaign that surrounded the Russian state and state-backed media’s representation of events was unsurprising, that the Rusemb-London joined this campaign by creating content and disseminating both false and misleading content can be seen as unconventional. Yet this also demonstrates the new state of play online, where in new media and social media, deregulated environments allow for the proliferation of political content designed to promote narratives to undermine facts, focusing on conflict over accuracy.

One outcome of this analysis has therefore been understanding that the traditional role of diplomats and embassies, at least in the Western understanding, has changed with the move online (Bjola, 2015). The shifting role of Embassies is important when understanding multiple ways that disinformation is created and spread from a foreign source to domestic ones. While much of the discussion on Russian strategic narratives and disinformation in general focuses on Russian media sources such as RT or Sputnik, (Yablokov and Chatterje-Doody 2020) the fact that the Rusemb-London is increasingly displaying similar controversial content online justifies further investigation. Although the increasing role of the Rusemb-London is being identified (Yablokov and Chatterje-Doody 2020; Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019) systematic analyses of the Embassy output is yet to be done. While this analysis aimed to contribute to this field, more work is required to identify the role of Russian Embassies internationally.

A second outcome of this analysis was to deconstruct the presentation of disinformation using the Skripal poisoning as a case study. Through the collection of tweets on the Rusemb-London’s Twitter account and a visual content analysis using composition,

semiotic and discourse methods, the framing of actors, events and messages became clearer. In contrast to appearing random, confusing and disorganized, eventually the representations became clearly repetitive, demonstrating that while the aim to confuse is facilitated by an anti-chronological ordering of the information, it can also be deconstructed to demonstrate how the visual clues and textual associations are used to propel strategic narratives within disinformation campaigns. An additional outcome of this paper also identified the vulnerabilities in the British political system and media which left ample room for disinformation to thrive in the domestic context and often amplified Russian strategic narratives or provided the information to be taken and used against the general public in the larger information environment.

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Master's Thesis Summary

This paper is a case study of the Skripal poisoning framing in Russian state media, namely from the Twitter account of the Russian Embassy in London. Through employing Bleiker's (2015) framework for visual content analysis, compositional, semiotic, and discursive features of tweets were categorized and analyzed for framing strategies. The analysis demonstrated various aspects framing devices used on the account connected to Actors, specifically fronting and disappearing different individuals, the Event, specifically how conspiratorial claims were accelerated to create plausible deniability in alternative explanations, and the Message, specifically discrediting British media while amplifying perceived British support for the Russian Embassy in London. Additionally, narrative linking between Syria and Glushkov was identified, and vulnerabilities in British domestic media highlighted which perpetuated Russian strategic narratives and framing surrounding the Skripal poisoning.

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*Source for all data in Appendices B – L is the Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed between Jan. to July 2020].

Cited in References as: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account (n.d.) *Russian Embassy, UK*, <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> (as of 28 July 2020).

Appendix A: Timeline

March 2	Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov arrive at London Gatwick, checking into the City Stay Hotel in East London for Friday and Saturday nights (Holton, 2018)
March 3	Yulia Skripal arrived in the UK from Moscow to visit her father Sergei Skripal who had been living in Salisbury, UK since a spy exchange in 2010 (Janjevic, 2018). Petrov and Boshirov were believed to have conducted a reconnaissance trip to Salisbury (Holton, 2018)
March 4	Sergei and Yulia “were found unconscious on a bench in Salisbury” at 4:15pm and “local police officer Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey was also taken seriously ill” (Holton, 2018) Petrov and Boshirov are captured on CCTV close to Skripal’s home and return to Moscow the same day (Holton, 2018)
March 12	Theresa May attributes attack to Russia in “highly likely” statement in British House of Commons (Asthana, et. al. 2018) Nikolai Glushkov found dead resulting from “compression to the neck” in his home in New Malden where he had lived since being granted political asylum in 2010 (BBC, 2018d).
March 13	May gives 24 hours “ultimatum” for cooperation or “clear message” will be sent including diplomatic expulsion (BBC, 2018c)
March 14	May announces expulsion of 23 diplomats and highlighted the Russian response of “sarcasm, contempt and defiance” (Stewart, Walker and Borger, 2018).
April 9	Yulia discharged from hospital (Greenfield and Bannock, 2018)
April 12	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirms substance used in Salisbury is Novichok (Sanders-Zakre, 2018)
May 23	Yulia releases video tape statement (Barry, 2018b)
June 30	Amesbury residents Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess apply “perfume” Rowley had found on June 27 th in Salisbury in a “counterfeit Nina Ricci perfume container” which contained Novichok (Holton, 2018)
July 8	Dawn Sturgess dies in hospital (Holton, 2018)
Sept. 5	“British authorities identify ‘Petrov’ and ‘Boshirov’” as suspects (SSEESing Salisbury)
Sept. 13	RT interview with Petrov and Boshirov (Guardian News, 2018)
Sept. 26	Bellingcat identify Boshirov as Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga a “highly decorated GRU officer” (Bellingcat Investigations Team 2018b)
Oct. 8	Bellingcat identify Petrov as Dr. Alexander Yevgenyevich Mishkin, “a trained military doctor in the employ of the GRU” (Bellingcat Investigations Team 2018c)

Appendix B: Examples of Contentious Tweets from the Russian Embassy in London (4 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy</p> <p>President Obama expels 35 🇷🇺 diplomats in Cold War deja vu. As everybody, incl 🇺🇸 people, will be glad to see the last of this hapless Adm.</p>  <p>👤 Russia in USA 🇺🇸 and 5 others</p> <p>9:09 PM · Dec 29, 2016 · Twitter for iPhone</p> <p>17.6K Retweets 21.4K Likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy</p> <p>If Russia is in decline, why worry? Maybe, real worry is West's decline and that we manage things better?</p>  <p>image used for illustration purposes</p> <p>♡ 978 7:58 PM - Oct 22, 2016</p> <p>💬 1,737 people are talking about this</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy</p> <p>In today's papers: pundits call on @Theresa_May to disrupt possible Russia-US thaw. No trust in Britain's best friend and ally?</p>  <p>👤 FT World News and 5 others</p> <p>1:48 PM · Jan 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client</p> <p>4.6K Retweets 6.6K Likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy</p> <p>It's like epidemic, or fashion? in the West with everybody claiming being hacked by Russia.</p>  <p>👤 The Sunday Times and 5 others</p> <p>3:15 PM · Feb 12, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone</p> <p>1.1K Retweets 1.7K Likes</p>

Appendix C: Russian Actors (38 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Putin (4 Images + 1 duplicate):

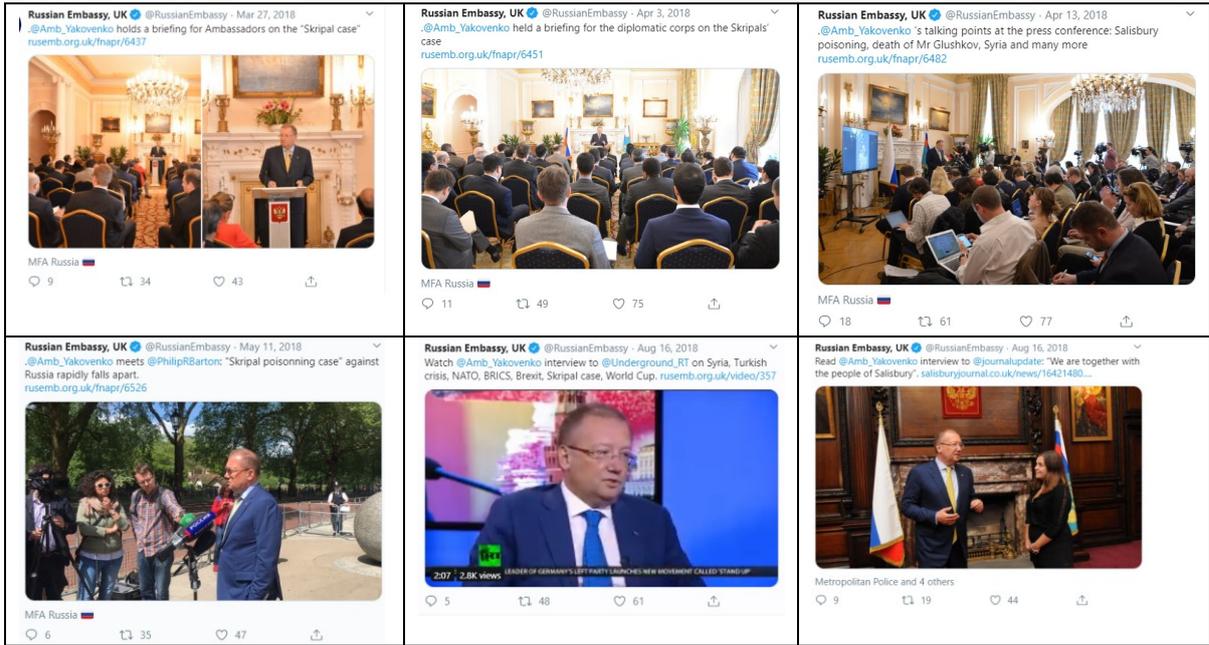
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 5, 2018 Putin: Russian citizens accused of "meddling" in US never acted on behalf of authorities. But US is most welcome to present any evidence for consideration in Russia.</p>  <p>24 55 122</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 26, 2018 Putin on UK claims on Salisbury poisoning: if a "military grade nerve agent" is used, then the victims die immediately, right on the spot.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 53 213 365</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 1/3 Putin: We have identified the individuals UK claims to be suspects.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 43 95 93</p> <p><i>* Duplicate from Suspects *</i></p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 2/3 Putin: they are private individuals.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 25 60 62</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 3/3 Putin: I call on them to appear before the media and tell their story.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 68 85 104</p>	

Russian Suspects (1 Images + 1 duplicate):

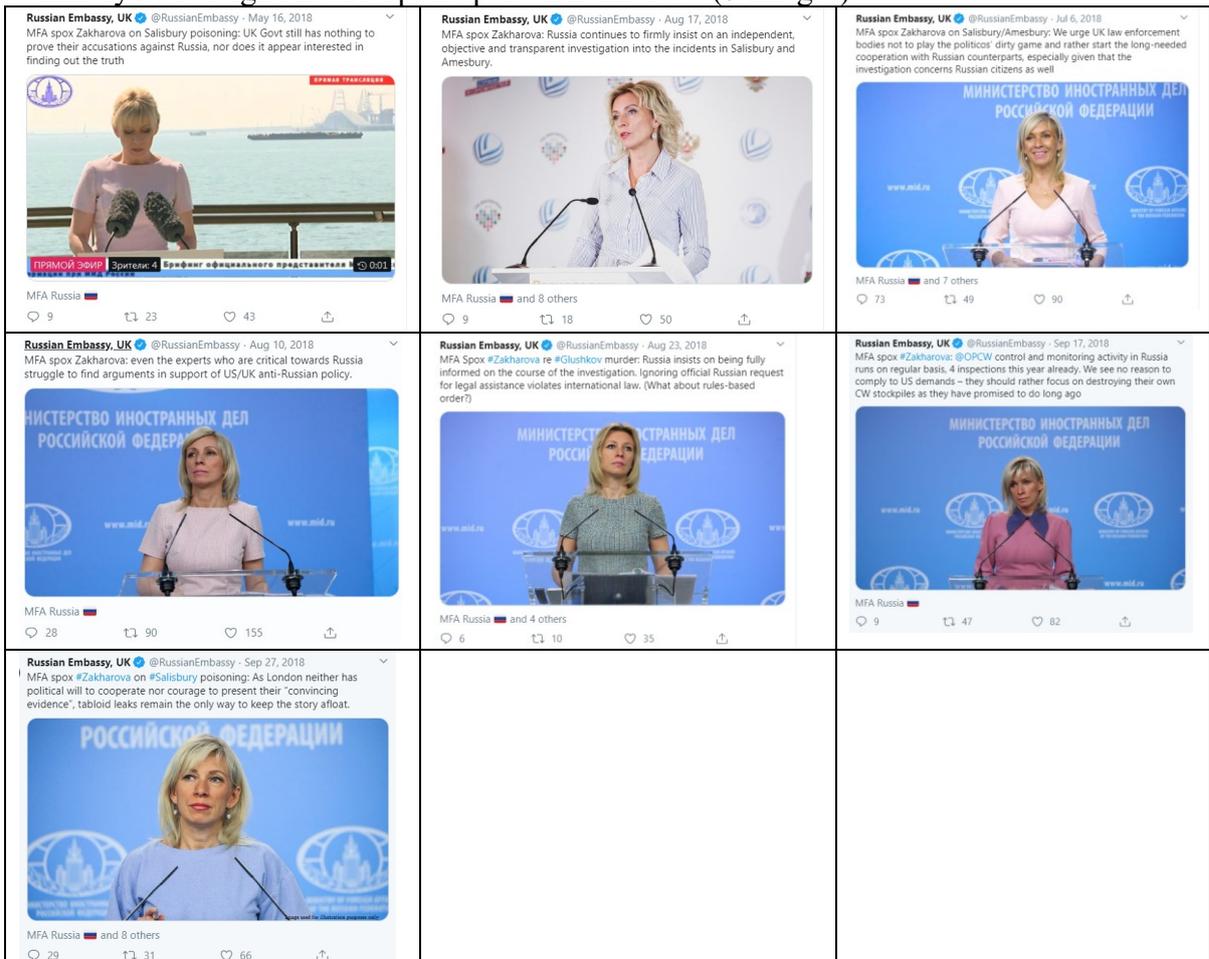
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 1/3 Putin: We have identified the individuals UK claims to be suspects.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 43 96 94</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 6, 2018 Men "working with the most deadly military grade toxin of high purity". How many differences can you spot?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 7 others 646 1.5K 2.5K</p> <p><i>*Duplicate from Humour*</i></p>	
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Ambassador Yakovenko (9 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 11, 2018 @Amb_Yakovenko held a briefing for the diplomatic corps: unsatisfactory state of Russia-UK relations, Iran nuclear deal, Syrian settlement, situation on Korean peninsula. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6524</p>  <p>MFA Russia 7 25 50</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 17, 2018 Reception in the honour of departing Embassy staff at the Ambassador's Residence rusemb.org.uk/activity/720</p>  <p>83 118 225</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 21, 2018 @Amb_Yakovenko gives a press conference on 22 March on current affairs. If you are a journalist and interested to attend, please write to press@rusemb.org.uk before 5 pm today for accreditation.</p>  <p>11 13 12</p>
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Zakharova (7 Images):



Lavrov (4 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 15, 2018 Lavrov: We remain ready on the Salisbury case on the basis of international law, but not on the basis of "highly likely". Meaningful discussion must be based on facts.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 3 others 87 244 387</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 24, 2018 FM Lavrov: "obvious Russophobic connotations" at G7 FM summit. Strange to see from countries proclaiming their interest in developing relations with Russia.</p>  <p>25 82 140</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 22, 2018 FM Lavrov: Russia is prepared to talk, but be it Salisbury or anything else, British "highly likely" will not work. Facts on the table, please. rusemb.org.uk/article/523</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 7 others 16 63 94</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 3, 2018 FM Lavrov: We are interested more than anyone in truth being established about Salisbury poisoning. But the attitude we see from some Western politicians is not only hindering the real investigation, it's also thoughtless, unworthy and unacceptable, especially in diplomacy.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 51 295 449</p>		

Additional Russian / Pro-Russian officials (4 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 .@RussiaUN envoy Nebenzia: Russia is utterly determined to find the truth in Skripal case. So far it seems that certain secret services carried out a terrorist attack vs Russian citizens.</p>  <p>Image used for illustration purposes only 34 77 89</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 28, 2018 .@RussiaUN envoy Nebenzia: by expelling diplomats from the Russian Permanent mission to UN, Washington openly abuse their role as UN headquarters host country.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 20 69 82</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 .@RussiaUN envoy Nebenzia: UK tries to sell their version, which is full of holes and unanswered questions, as a proven verdict.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Foreign Office 13 41 80</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 16, 2018 Noteworthy: @VOANews interviews defector scientist Vil Mirzayanov who coined the term "Novichok agent": "The British could easily have synthesized it on the basis of the formulas that I published in my book in 2008"</p>  <p>51 203 198</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018 Contrary to UK Govt claims that "only Russia produced Novichok", Czech President Zeman confirmed in @TBarrandov interview that small quantities of A-230 nerve agent were synthesized for research purposes in Brno and later destroyed. Any modern lab can make it.</p>  <p>16 78 132</p>	

Russian Buildings of Power (6 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 14, 2018 .@mfa_russia: statement by PM @theresa_may Theresa May in Parliament on measures to "punish" Russia constitutes an unprecedented, flagrant provocation that undermines the foundations of normal dialogue between our countries. Read in full: rusemb.org.uk/inapri/6421</p>  <p>80 155 138</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 17, 2018 .@MFA_Russia summoned UK Amb Bristow to inform of response to UK provocations following Salisbury incident: 23 diplo staff expelled in 7 days. Consulate General in St Petersburg closed to reach numerical parity. British Council to cease operations due to lack of legal grounds.</p>  <p>UKinRussia and Foreign Office 34 60 109</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 26, 2018 .@mfa_russia statement on the decision taken by some EU and NATO countries to expel Russian diplomats rusemb.org.uk/inapri/6432</p>  <p>22 47 51</p>
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Russian Press Releases (3 Images):



Appendix D: Russian Victims (29 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Sergei Skripal: (5 images + 3 duplicates)

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 8, 2018 He was actually a British spy, working for MI6</p> <p>Russian spy and his daughter were poisoned by nerve agent</p> <p>The Guardian and MFA Russia</p> <p>962 2.8K 3.5K</p> <p><i>*Duplicate from Appendix I*</i></p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 7, 2018 Presumption of innocence 2.0: no idea what happened, no idea why it happened, but Russians are to blame.</p> <p>The dark arts of the Russian poisoner</p> <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>126 242 394</p> <p><i>*Dupl</i></p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 10, 2018 What a coincidence! Both Litvinenko and Skripal worked for MI6. Berezovsky and Perepilichny were linked to UK special services. Investigation details classified on grounds of national security.</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>263 489 494</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 10, 2018 @FT is trying to convince British public that MI6 agent Skripal actively worked for the Russian intelligence, that's why he was dangerous for Russia. Little doubt the investigation will be classified.</p> <p>Toxic atmosphere Did Kremlin poison an ex-Russian spy?</p> <p>Why Skripal was a target, page 2 Big Read, page 9</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>60 119 165</p> <p><i>*Duplicate from Appendix I*</i></p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 24, 2018 Kremlin spox: there was no letter from Sergei Skripal to President Putin to allow him to come back to Russia</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>14 41 56</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 20, 2018 PM Lavrov: if Russia had any reasons to "want revenge on Sergei Skripal" why pardon and exchange him in 2010?</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>30 75 159</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 15, 2018 Q: How would you comment on today's British media reports on Sergei Skripal's cooperation with Czech and Estonian intelligence services? A: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6533</p> <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>13 53 61</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 18, 2018 Q: Are there any changes in the UK position on cooperation with Russia on investigation of Nikolay Glushkov's murder & the attempt on the lives of the Skripals? What is the status of requests by Rus Prosecutor General's Office received by @ukhomeoffice? A: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6565</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>10 24 25</p>	

Sergei and Yulia Skripal (4 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 18, 2018 Sergei Skripal's discharge from the hospital: we wish him full recovery, but in absence of opportunity to meet Skripals in person we consider actions of UK authorities as forcible detention/abduction of Russian citizens rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6536</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>94 209 301</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 30, 2018 @BBCNewsnight story of treatment of Sergei and Yulia Skripal: statements of the medical staff seem to have been prompted to support the official position, but multiple questions remain unanswered. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6548</p> <p>MFA Russia and Mark Urban</p> <p>22 81 91</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 3, 2018 Five months have passed since the poisoning in Salisbury, and Russia was immediately accused of committing the crime. It is high time UK Govt presents at least some evidence, for a change. UK's international reputation is at stake. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6610</p> <p>MFA Russia and 7 others</p> <p>58 281 440</p>
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<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 4, 2018 Six months in isolation: Russia demands that UK stops violating intl law and human rights of Sergey and Yulia #Skripal. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6643</p>  <p>Home Office and 9 others</p> <p>89 242 294</p>		
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Yulia Skripal (11 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 30, 2018 Good news as Yulia Skripal is reported as recovering well. We insist on the right to see her, in accordance with the 1968 Consular Convention.</p>  <p>1.3K 951 1.5K</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 5, 2018 Q: Is there any new information from UK authorities regarding health condition of Yulia Skripal? A: Right after the conclusion of today's press conference of @Amb_Yakovenko, we received an urgent Note Verbale from @foregnoffice... rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6456</p>  <p>35 83 78</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 10, 2018 We are genuinely happy for Yulia Skripal and wish her a further recovery and rehabilitation. We pay tribute to the professionalism of NHS staff. At the same time, media reports that Yulia has left hospital for a "secure location" cause concern. Read: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6472</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>78 141 217</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 23, 2018 Glad to have seen Yulia Skripal alive and well. But the video shown only strengthens our concerns that she could be held against her own will and speaking under pressure. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6539</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>238 525 726</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 25, 2018 Embassy press officer on current state of Salisbury poisoning investigation: British allegations debunked; decontamination strongly resembles destruction of evidence. Russian proposals for cooperation left unanswered rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6543</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>54 140 201</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 27, 2018 Concerning continuing isolation of Yulia Skripal: We once again urge UK authorities to observe their obligations under international law, as they are keen to require from other states. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6601</p>  <p>59 269 399</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 11, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's reply to a question about the reports on Yulia Skripal's whereabouts rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6476</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>11 32 41</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 12, 2018 So far not a single post-4 March photo of Sergei and Yulia Skripal has emerged. This lack of transparency is here for a reason, and this reason is highly likely not protecting the Russian citizens.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Foreign Office</p> <p>95 144 247</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 12, 2018 "Yulia Skripal statement" is carefully worded to support UK official narrative and to block Yulia from outside world rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6478</p>  <p>Deborah Haynes and 4 others</p> <p>38 89 145</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 12, 2018 Embassy comment in relation to the "Statement issued on behalf of Yulia Skripal" published by the @metpoliceuk rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6478</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>41 88 122</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 23, 2018 One day - several very similar articles in different papers with leaked news on Yulia Skripal. Coincidence?</p>  <p>37 84 103</p> <p><i>*Duplicate from Appendix I*</i></p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 24, 2018 The bottom line is that MI5 should expect better results from their translators - for 32K/year they should be able to write statements which sound more Russian.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>75 205 371</p> <p><i>*Duplicate from Appendix I*</i></p>

Viktoria Skripal (4 images+ 1 duplicate):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 29, 2018 Sergei Skripal's niece on @BBCRussian: UK government provides no information on my uncle's and cousin's condition.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>28 166 159</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 Different UK excuses for refusing Viktoria Skripal visa to visit her family members in Salisbury hold no water. What does Britain have to hide? rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6460</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>74 159 215</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 @UKinRussia: we would like to reassure ordinary #Russians that they should have no concerns about visiting the #UK - of course if their name is not Viktoria Skripal!</p> <p>UKinRussia @ukinrussia · 1д In response to queries we have been receiving, we would like to reassure ordinary #Russians that they should have no concerns about visiting the #UK</p>  <p>МИД России and 2 others</p> <p>52 205 287</p>						
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 17, 2018 Wonder why nobody trusts UK Government's explanations?</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy</p> <p>Sergei Skripal's niece Viktoria was denied UK visa again. What do you think is the reason?</p> <p>Перевести с английского</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>54 232 351</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 15, 2018 Sergei Skripal's niece Viktoria was denied UK visa again. What do you think is the reason?</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Application form mistake</td> <td>9.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Keep Skripals isolated</td> <td>77.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>For her own safety</td> <td>12.7%</td> </tr> </table> <p>866 votes · Final results</p> <p>47 96 59</p> <p><i>*Duplicate from Appendix K*</i></p>	Application form mistake	9.6%	Keep Skripals isolated	77.7%	For her own safety	12.7%	
Application form mistake	9.6%							
Keep Skripals isolated	77.7%							
For her own safety	12.7%							

Other Russian Victims (6 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 8, 2018 MFA: when Boris Berezovsky and Alexander Perepilichny died in Britain, there was a lot of speculation in the media, then all the conclusions were classified, and no data provided to Russia. Same happening now, with M16 agent Sergei Skripal poisoning</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>107 164 185</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 9, 2018 Investigation of Sergei Skripal case follows the Litvinenko script: most info to be classified, Russia to get no access to investigation files and no opportunity to assess its credibility</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>92 120 161</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 14, 2018 Disappointed with lack of cooperation from the British side in investigation of incidents with Russian nationals rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6422</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>36 71 102</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 7, 2018 On recent "Perepilichny case" publication: like in other high-profile cases related to Russian citizens in UK, dangerous trends of defaming testimonies and interested persons in the course of inquest are becoming the new norm. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6617</p>  <p>The Telegraph and MFA Russia</p> <p>9 17 24</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 18, 2018 Classifying data on #Perepilichny's secret services links is another example of UK authorities twisting judicial process. Cf. Litvinenko, Berezovsky, Skripal...</p>  <p>Home Office and 8 others</p> <p>7 11 17</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 18, 2018 So, what else is new?</p> <p>Alexander Perepilichny possible M16 links to stay secret</p> <p>By Jim Reed and Louis Lee Ray BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme</p> <p>8 hours ago</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 6 others</p> <p>11 45 97</p>

Appendix E: British Officials (32 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Theresa May (9 images):

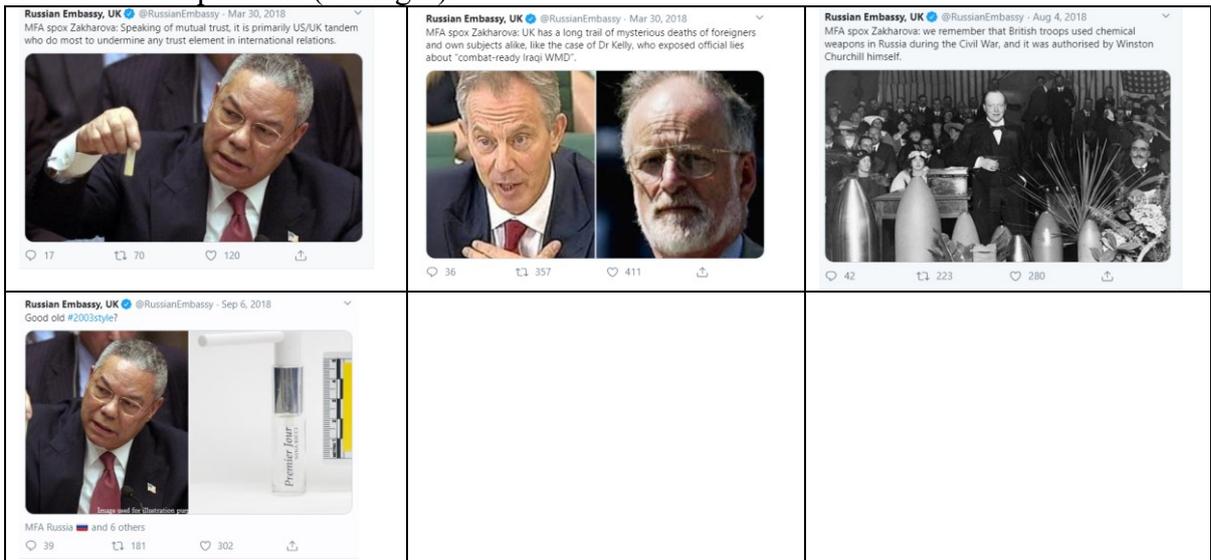
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 7/7 Today the Embassy sent a note to @ForeignOffice reiterating that Russia is not involved in the Salisbury incident and outlining the above mentioned demands for joint investigation</p>  <p>137 246 225</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 FM Lavrov on good political manners: the times of colonialism are long gone</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Boris Johnson 60 82 143</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 15, 2018 Successful @GazpromEN bonds sales in London with demand three times higher than the placing (€750 mln). Business as usual?</p>  <p>London Stock Exchange and 3 others 27 103 140</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 15, 2018 Decision to break official contacts with Russia undermines UK standing in the world</p>  <p>MFA Russia 155 153 276</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 27, 2018 UK Government may say it's "highly likely" or "quite clear" that Russia is behind the Salisbury poisoning. But even if they were "absolutely sure", they would have to show facts.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 148 339 567</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 28, 2018 Embassy Press Officer answers questions on statements by Prime Minister @theresa_may rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6439</p>  <p>MFA Russia 10 23 40</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 31, 2018 More questions to UK Govt on Salisbury poisoning. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6447</p>  <p>39 89 112</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 3, 2018 New leaks on the Skripals case published by @thetimes: accusations against Russia are, after two months, still not supported by any facts. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6516</p>  <p>MFA Russia 24 138 179</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 6, 2018 @OPCW envoy Shulgin: I remember another story of a high-ranking UK official making accusations about CW and citing intelligence information as a proof.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 6 others 25 82 130</p>

Boris Johnson (5 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 6, 2018 Is Secretary @BorisJohnson right? Read our comment and judge for yourself rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6412</p>  <p>MFA Russia 37 38 45</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 27, 2018 If @theresa_may government has no quarrel with Russian people, as @BorisJohnson says, why not provide the proof of their accusations out of mere respect for the Russian people?</p>  <p>MFA Russia 85 243 404</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 Those calling for Russian diplomats' expulsion don't care about Global Britain and its diplomats in Moscow.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others 181 244 331</p>
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Political Comparisons (4 images):



British Buildings of Power (5 Images)



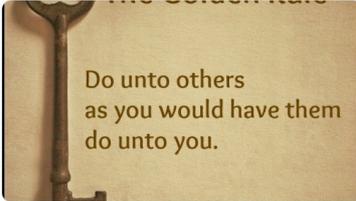
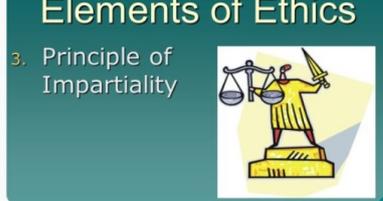
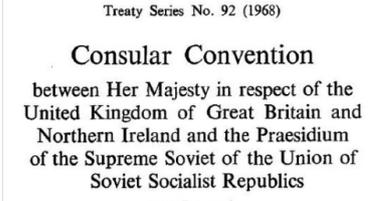
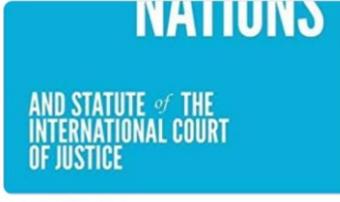
Additional Officials (9 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 8, 2018</p> <p>"Totally agree with Secretary @Amber Rudd HR: first evidence then conclusions on Mr Skripal's case. Responsible political approach."</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others</p> <p>18 25 57</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018</p> <p>17 UK Ambassador Laurence Britov was summoned to @MFA_Russia, where First Deputy FM Vladimir Titov strongly protested the evidence-free accusations by the UK authorities of Russia's alleged involvement in the poisoning of Serge Skripal and his daughter Yulia.</p>  <p>59 269 237</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 2, 2018</p> <p>So it turns out that Salisbury poisoning allegations were merely a testing ground for "fusion doctrine" promoted by @markesdwill. Risky path for UK. Read our comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6515</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>36 244 253</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 14, 2018</p> <p>Regarding the statement by MIS Director General: It is incumbent on the UK to produce credible explanation, supported by facts, of what happened with the two Russian nationals on British soil. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6529</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>35 50 84</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 29, 2018</p> <p>UK political leadership has rushed to put forward charges vs Russia in Salisbury case without any evidence. Now it is confirmed by UK Ambassador to Moscow who admits to @bbcussian that investigation is still in progress, and there is no proven suspect rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6574</p>  <p>MFA Russia and UKinRussia</p> <p>10 63 86</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 22, 2018</p> <p>@jensstoltenberg claims that Russia "seems to have no qualms about using military-grade nerve agents on our streets" is nothing but blatant and irresponsible disinformation, misleading British citizens as well as the whole international community rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6568</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>28 65 118</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 5, 2018</p> <p>"Russian disinformation campaign"? The best way to put an end to all media speculations is to lift the secrecy of the investigation so as to work together to discover the truth. @sajidjavid. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6580</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 7 others</p> <p>57 156 251</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 5, 2018</p> <p>.@BWallaceMP claims he "waits for the phone call from the Russian state". Having offered Russia's assistance from the outset, we are ready to hear his proposals about time and day of the meeting. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6581</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 6 others</p> <p>21 59 104</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 7, 2018</p> <p>Deputy FM Ryabkov on #Salisbury poisoning accusations: The play was written well beforehand, but is dull and predictable. Loud but groundless accusations have become trademark features.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 3 others</p> <p>13 43 68</p>

Appendix F: Rights and Provocations (25 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Legal Rights (11 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 1, 2018 Reputation matters. After declining Russia access to Russian nationals in UK, why should @foreignoffice expect other countries to satisfy similar British requests?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and FCO travel advice 107 172 299</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 2, 2018 Question without answer #1: Why has Russia been denied consular access to the two Russian nationals, Sergei and Yulia Skripal, that have become crime victims in the British territory?</p>  <p>MFA Russia 172 374 477</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 3, 2018 Russian @OPCW envoy: Russia will accept results of the OPCW Salisbury poisoning investigation only if Russian experts participate in it.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Russian Embassy in NL 41 76 110</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 4, 2018 Russia to convene UN Security Council emergency meeting on 5 April on the Salisbury poisoning</p>  <p>Russian Mission UN and 3 others 33 164 230</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 11, 2018 Embassy's comment on the claims that the UK has complied with its international obligation under Consular Conventions rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6475</p>  <p>MFA Russia 8 47 56</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 11, 2018 Embassy press officer's reply to a question concerning the situation with consular access to Sergei and Yulia Skripal: if they don't require our assistance, they can inform us directly. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6528</p>  <p>MFA Russia 19 38 50</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 14, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's reply to a question concerning violations of rights of Sergei and Yulia Skripal by the British authorities: UK continues to blatantly violate the rights of Sergei and Yulia Skripal rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6531</p>  <p>MFA Russia 32 40 52</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 6, 2018 Fully agree - shame the article is not about the Salisbury poisoning.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and The Telegraph 20 94 225</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 8, 2018 New legislation introduced to @UKParliament in the context of the Salisbury poisoning: arbitrary searches and detentions, now encouraged by law. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6558</p>  <p>MFA Russia 7 15 12</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 17, 2018 Meanwhile, Russia's proposal to establish cooperation under paragraph 2, Article IX of the CWC continues to be blatantly ignored by the British side. Read the full comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6629</p>  <p>UK Delegation OPCW and 8 others 12 42 77</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 23, 2018 Unilateral actions, interference in other states' affairs, blatant pressure on others to the point of aggression against "misbehaving" countries is NOT a "rules-based international order", but violations of the UN Charter. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6635</p>  <p>Foreign Office and 8 others 8 30 41</p>	

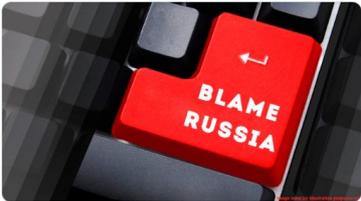
International Role (7 images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 4/7 Britain must comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention which stipulates joint investigation into the incident, for which Moscow is ready.</p>  <p>65 367 353</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 31, 2018 While some Western countries expelled about 150 Russian diplomats, over 150,000 civilians left Eastern Ghouta to safety thanks to Russian diplomatic effort. Compare and make conclusions.</p>  <p>Foreign Office and MFA Russia 54 301 519</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 2, 2018 Russia convenes emergency @OPCW session on 4 April to deal with the Salisbury provocation.</p>  <p>16 122 151</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 25, 2018 Embassy press officer's reply to a question on the UK's response to Russia's request in the @OPCW rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6507</p>  <p>MFA Russia 3 14 19</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 1, 2018 London keeps trying to use @OPCW in its geopolitical interests. Nothing to do with the struggle against the use of chemical weapons, harmful for the OPCW rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6551</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 3 others 1 19 36</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 28, 2018 On assigning attributive functions to @OPCW: London and its allies have, by using political manipulation and outright blackmail, managed to push through this decision. We believe this decision to be illegitimate. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6571</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 5 others 16 44 53</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 8, 2018 @OPCW experts invited to the UK: technical assistance requested lacks transparency and attests to the UK's arbitrary interpretation of the CWC. No substantive answers have been provided to our numerous legitimate and comprehensive questions. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6619</p>  <p>MFA Russia 21 78 74</p>		

Reputational Damage and Provocations (8 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 2/7 It was stated that the actions of the UK authorities are a clear provocation and that the Russian Federation was not involved in the incident that took place in Salisbury on 4 March, 2018.</p>  <p>63 195 192</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 30, 2018 Search of @aeroflot plane at @HeathrowAirport was a blatant provocation. Read why: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6445</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others 111 197 253</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 14, 2018 Attention Russian citizens! @RussianEmbassy has been informed of unprovoked stops and interrogations of Russian citizens, who legally arrive to Great Britain having UK visas, by the UK Border Force and police. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6530</p>  <p>MFA Russia 46 113 82</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 27, 2018 British media informs that the number of Russian students in UK public schools has gone down almost 40% over the past two years. Here is what we think about it: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6513</p>  <p>Independent Schools and 3 others 20 44 62</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 10, 2018 US come to the rescue of London in their double game, while the British authorities are unable to present any credible evidence. Read our comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6621</p>  <p>MFA Russia 21 56 82</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 16, 2018 No proof of allegations = bad UK reputation. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6627</p>  <p>Home Office and 2 others 29 64 126</p>

Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 19, 2018
Fully agree with @RepThomasMassie that Russia scare is a distraction from real threats while all the hysteria impedes bilateral relations.



22 31 99

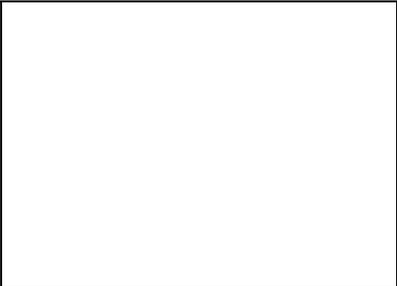
Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018
6/7 Any threat to take "punitive" measures against Russia will meet with a response. The British side should be aware of that.



Every action has an equal and opposite reaction

MFA Russia

507 590 660



Appendix G: Salisbury (42 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Glushkov scene / mentions: (6 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 16, 2018 The Investigative Committee of Russia @sledcom_rf opens criminal cases over attempted murder of Yulia Skripal and murder of Nikolai Glushkov</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>75 89 129</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 25, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's on the investigation of Nikolay Glushkov death: British authorities continue to refuse to cooperate, law enforcement agencies unwilling to shed light on this crime against a Russian citizen rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6544</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>13 21 26</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 13, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's reply to a media question concerning the inquest into the death of Nikolay Glushkov: we urge the British authorities to live up to their obligations under international law. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6560</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>6 19 28</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 2, 2018 Investigation of Nikolay Glushkov's death: unacceptable that UK authorities, bypass international legal mechanisms, are trying to conceal the circumstances and all information concerning the investigation into the death of the Russian national. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6608</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>16 28 48</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 10, 2018 12 August marks five months since the mysterious death of the Russian citizen Nikolay Glushkov. British authorities still hamper establishing the truth and bringing those responsible to justice.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>28 82 109</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 25, 2018 Comment of the Embassy on the murder of Mr N.A.Glushkov and the concealment of related information by the UK Police rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6504</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>7 18 17</p>

Salisbury (36 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 6, 2018 Embassy's Press Officer comments on the incident with Sergei Skripal rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6411</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>11 28 29</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 7, 2018 Embassy's Press Officer replies to a question on the "Sergei Skripal case" rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6414</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>18 12 19</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 21, 2018 Head of @mfa_russia Department of Nonproliferation & Arms Control Ermakov held a briefing for foreign diplomats about the latest developments in Skripal case. Overwhelming majority believe that any conclusions should follow evidence - UK in minority.</p>  <p>UKinRussia</p> <p>35 98 163</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 26, 2018 Media reveals mystery in Salisbury poisoning, with mobile phones of both victims off for 4 hours on the day of the incident. So far, so many questions. Transparent investigation is the only solution.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>58 212 282</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 28, 2018 MFA: lack of UK authorities' interest in identifying causes and perpetrators of the Salisbury poisoning makes involvement of UK intelligence services highly likely. Read the full statement: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6441</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>78 378 374</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 4, 2018 Embassy press officer answers question on inconsistencies in Skripal case rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6453</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>5 50 72</p>

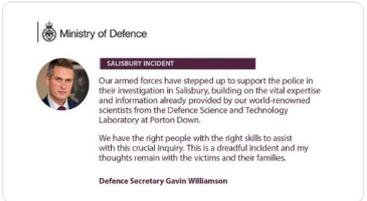
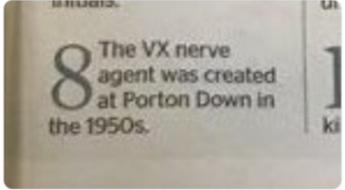
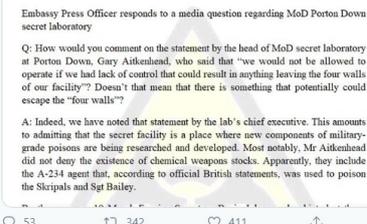
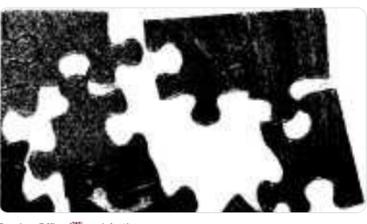
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 10, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's comment on interaction with the @foreignoffice on the investigation of the Salisbury incident: urge UK authorities to act in a transparent way and try fixing the damage they have caused to the international image of their country. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6474</p>  <p>MFA Russia 29 47 85</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 14, 2018 FM Lavrov: Swiss lab says 'BZ toxin' used in Salisbury poisoning. It was never produced or stored in Russia, but has been in use in US, UK military. It acts in 30-60 minutes, effects last up to 4 days.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 175 1.3K 1.2K</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 14, 2018 Unexpected discovery in Salisbury poisoning investigation by Swiss experts. Read our comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6486</p>  <p>77 412 463</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 17, 2018 Given that no resident has been poisoned by a nerve agent over six weeks, Salisbury decontamination looks more like destruction of the important evidence. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6491</p>  <p>MFA Russia 90 204 300</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 19, 2018 @RussiaUN Envoy Nebenzia: the investigation of Salisbury poisoning still in progress, yet HMG keeps claiming Russia is to blame. Isn't it a form of political pressure on the investigators?</p>  <p>22 50 78</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 19, 2018 @RussiaUN Envoy Nebenzia: UK is meticulously destroying material evidence of Salisbury poisoning. But Russia will continue to search for truth, demand answers from the British side and won't let them get away with it.</p>  <p>25 128 181</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 20, 2018 Q: How did Russia react to a recent statement of @g7 foreign ministers accusing Russia of poisoning of Sergei Skripal and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury? A: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6496</p>  <p>Foreign Office and MFA Russia 32 48 60</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 24, 2018 Embassy's press officer response to a media question on the investigation of the Skripals' poisoning in Salisbury rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6503</p>  <p>MFA Russia 15 25 26</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 25, 2018 Embassy press officer's reply to a question on the coverage of the Salisbury incident in the British media rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6506</p>  <p>MFA Russia 4 33 35</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018 Two months since Salisbury poisoning: two Conservative Government's myths completely destroyed Read our comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6517</p>  <p>MFA Russia 23 65 91</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 8, 2018 Skripals' case: despite huge efforts official political version still lacks any facts or proof rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6522</p>  <p>MFA Russia 30 108 171</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 17, 2018 German media deals another crushing blow to UK official version that "only Russia possessed Novichok": @zeitonline confirms that BND intelligence service had all the information about A234 since 1990s, evidence points to production in several NATO countries</p>  <p>MFA Russia 9 104 123</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 4, 2018 Skripals poisoning 3 months on: we will continue to demand comprehensive answers from British authorities to the dozens of questions raised by the Embassy in its Notes Verbales rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6533</p>  <p>Guardian news and 3 others 29 135 188</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 6, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's reply to a media question concerning the @metpoliceuk statement on the "Skripals case" rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6556</p>  <p>MFA Russia 9 35 40</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 28, 2018 Media reports: houses of Sergei Skripal and Det Sgt Nick Bailey to be purchased by UK authorities. If any evidence is lost in the process, it would only confirm that UK authorities are deliberately trying to make a transparent investigation impossible. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6570</p>  <p>MFA Russia 24 199 252</p>

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 5, 2018 UK reaction to Amesbury incident puzzling. Russia proposed a joint investigation into Salisbury from the very outset, proposal remains valid. Instead of cooperating, London prefers to muddy the waters, confuse and intimidate its own citizens. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6579</p>  <p>Foreign Office and 7 others 101 replies 237 retweets 320 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 9, 2018 We express our sincere condolences to relatives and friends of Dawn Sturges. We hope the poisoning will be investigated, not manipulated to fit some political frameworks. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6583</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 58 replies 188 retweets 409 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 11, 2018 Unfortunately, @foreignoffice chose to ignore our request to meet Mr Aitkenhead. Obviously UK authorities wish to prevent us from communicating with experts who might have some inconvenient information. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6584</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Dstl 26 replies 63 retweets 101 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 17, 2018 @nymtimes publishes yet another version of Salisbury poisoning. Strange that, while UK authorities conceal everything they can about investigation from public, extremely sensitive information gets shared with private individuals. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6589</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 10 replies 45 retweets 52 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 19, 2018 Alleged "identification of suspects in Salisbury"; we welcome the fact that this time the Govt chose to criticise "ill informed and wild speculations", not distribute them. Read comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6593</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 9 replies 17 retweets 26 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 27, 2018 @ITV interview with Mr Rowley: UK authorities should present real evidence instead of deliberately confusing the public. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6600</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 5 replies 31 retweets 41 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jul 17, 2018 Statements by @JohnGlenUK on Salisbury/Amesbury misleading. MPs should rather demand that their government perform a thorough and transparent investigation of the incidents instead of frightening the public. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6602</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 17 replies 21 retweets 45 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Aug 7, 2018 Until official information on the Salisbury incident is presented, we consider all media leaks as political trickery and attempts to further obfuscate the situation. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6614</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 59 replies 155 retweets 275 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Jun 25, 2018 Embassy set forth its position on the Salisbury incident in a letter to His Royal Highness rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6569</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others 6 replies 4 retweets 9 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Aug 24, 2018 Congratulations to the people of #Salisbury, but too many questions remain. Official inconsistencies help build up "Russian threat" rhetoric instead of contributing to investigation. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6639</p>  <p>Home Office and 9 others 17 replies 51 retweets 76 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Sep 7, 2018 The notion that Russia has produced dozens of fake narratives on Salisbury is a fake in itself. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6648</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 3 others 40 replies 32 retweets 74 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Sep 10, 2018 Embassy to @ukhomeoffice @sajidjavid: True, the Russian Constitution prohibits extradition of Russian nationals. But other legal avenues are open for the UK. Refusal to explore them reveals lack of evidence.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 4 others 17 replies 32 retweets 48 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Sep 27, 2018 UK has now formally rejected Russian requests for legal assistance in the #Salisbury case. Read our comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6660</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 9 others 38 replies 55 retweets 57 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Sep 28, 2018 We call on UK authorities to finally present an official case on #Salisbury, supported by documented evidence, not soap-opera style tabloid leaks. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6663</p>  <p>Home Office and 9 others 70 replies 174 retweets 325 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy - Aug 13, 2018 British media keep producing leaks that UK authorities are about to submit an extradition request for suspects in Salisbury poisoning. Let's put the record straight: rusemb.org.uk/news/9165</p>  <p>BBC London and 7 others 12 replies 44 retweets 73 likes</p>

Appendix H: Poison (27 Images)

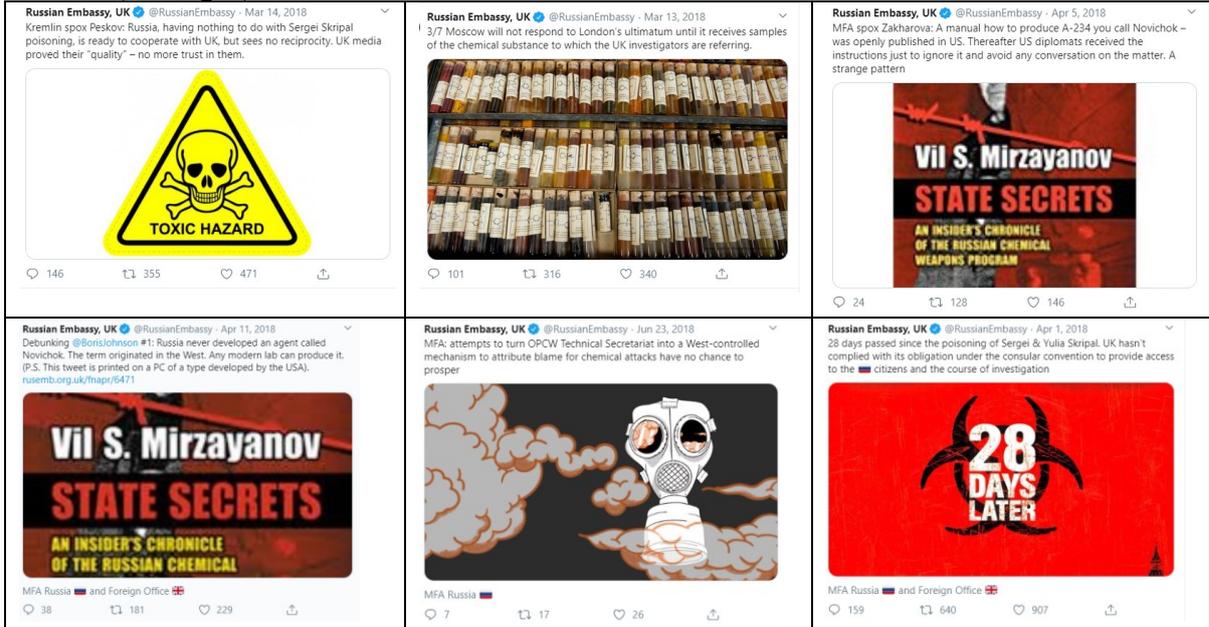
Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Porton Down (14 Images):

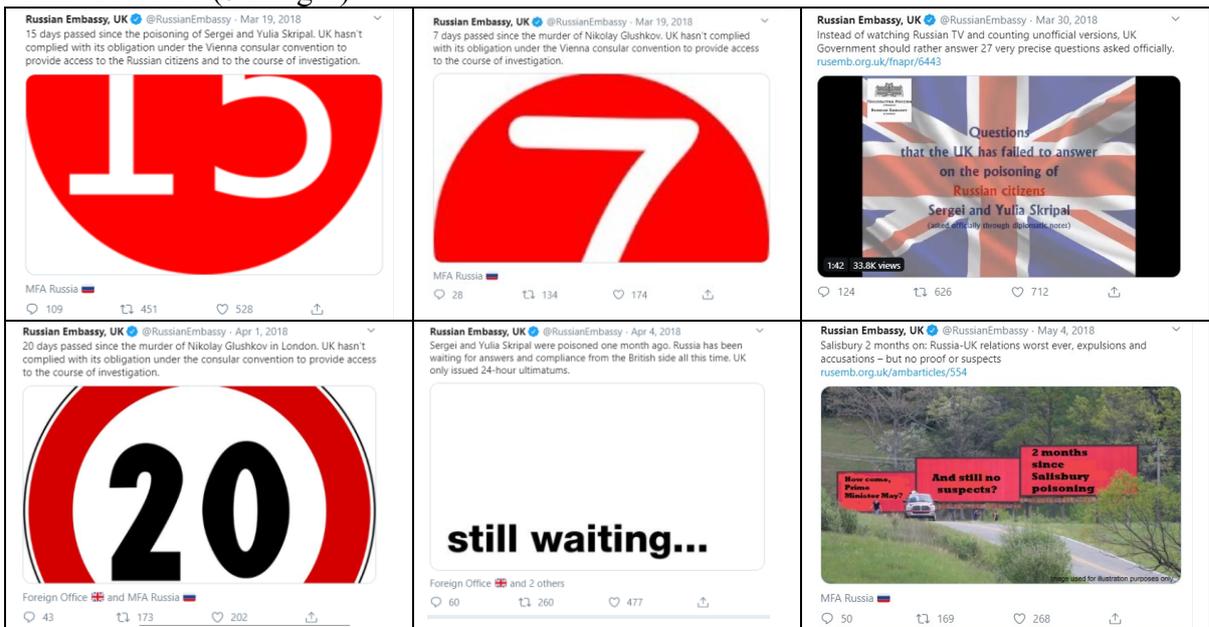
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 9, 2018 Wonder why @GavinWilliamson makes explicit link with the nearby Porton Down chemical weapons lab</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>55 94 127</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 15, 2018 @RussiaUN: in 1992 Russia closed all Soviet chemical weapons programmes. Some of the scientists were flown to the West (incl UK) where they continued research. To identify a substance, formula and samples are needed – means UK has capacity to produce suspected nerve agent.</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>175 564 596</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 17, 2018 Might well be point on any list. @thetimes</p>  <p>32 117 190</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 24, 2018 Read our comment on MoD Porton Down secret lab activity</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>53 342 411</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 5, 2018 It turns out Sergey Skripal has two cats and two guinea pigs. Were they also poisoned? Where are they and how are they treated? Important questions for the investigation. Read our comment: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6455</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>139 222 308</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 On Sergey Skripal pets. @DefraGovUK gave the sort of answer that brings about still more questions. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6457</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>43 71 74</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 Are they seriously saying that nobody had a look at the pets at alleged crime scene? Were the animals' remains tested for toxic substances? Or just disposed of as an inconvenient piece of evidence?</p> <p>cat is the first fatality after nerve agent attack in Salisbury</p> <p>The critically ill spook's two guinea pigs also perished from thirst in the days following the attack at their home</p> <p>EXCLUSIVE</p> <p>By Harry Cole, Westminster Correspondent</p> <p>5th April 2018, 9:00 nm</p> <p>Harry Cole and 6 others</p> <p>102 339 506</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 24, 2018 MFA Spox #Zakharova: UK wants @OPCW to check "Novichok" samples provided by UK, not taken by OPCW experts themselves. Manipulation of procedure will not bring added value to investigating #Salisbury poisoning.</p>  <p>UK Delegation OPCW and 5 others</p> <p>7 21 37</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 3, 2018 DSTL's Annual Report and Accounts: Porton Down @dstlmod secret lab had "53 incidents, of which 42 were investigated as high potential/actual incidents" in 2017/18 only. A number of DSTL employees died under suspicious circumstances. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6609</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>20 96 91</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 9, 2018 MFA spox Zakharova: UK should be held responsible for the accusation they have made. We insist on investigation of the military-grade poison production in Porton Down @dstlmod secret lab</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>21 74 108</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 3, 2018 Porton Down fails to tie Salisbury poison to Russia: UK Government loses key piece of its "intelligence picture" – and the rest are kept secret even from Britain's allies. Read rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6450</p>  <p>Foreign Office and 4 others</p> <p>63 319 367</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 4, 2018 Why would @foreignoffice delete this tweet from 22 March?</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>203 1.3K 1.6K</p>



Poison (6 Images):



Time Pressure (7 Images):



Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 25, 2018
Salisbury poisoning almost 3 months on: time has come for British authorities to apologize for the hollow accusations accompanied by an unprecedented anti-Russian campaign rusemb.org.uk/tnapr/6541



MFA Russia 🇷🇺

49 77 137

Appendix I: Newspaper Photographs (50 Images)

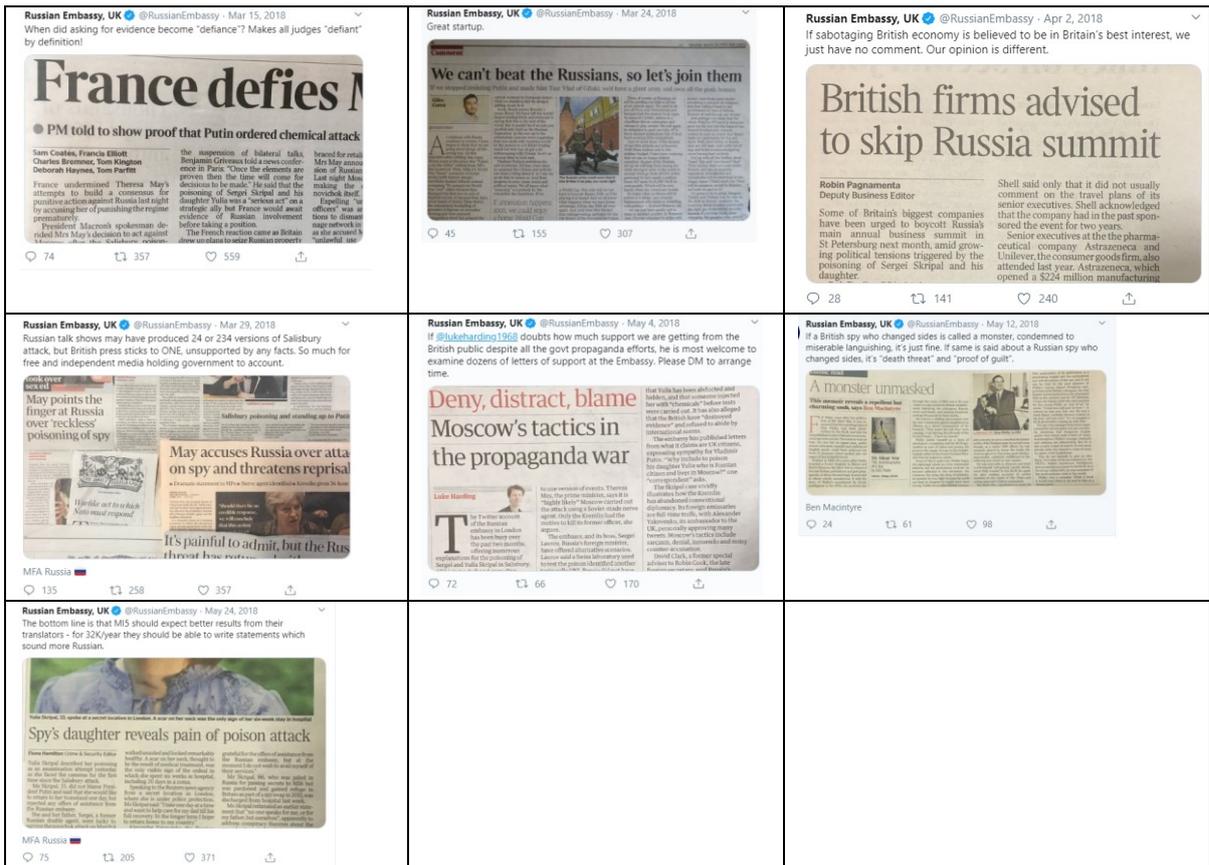
Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Headlines / Limited text (12 Images):

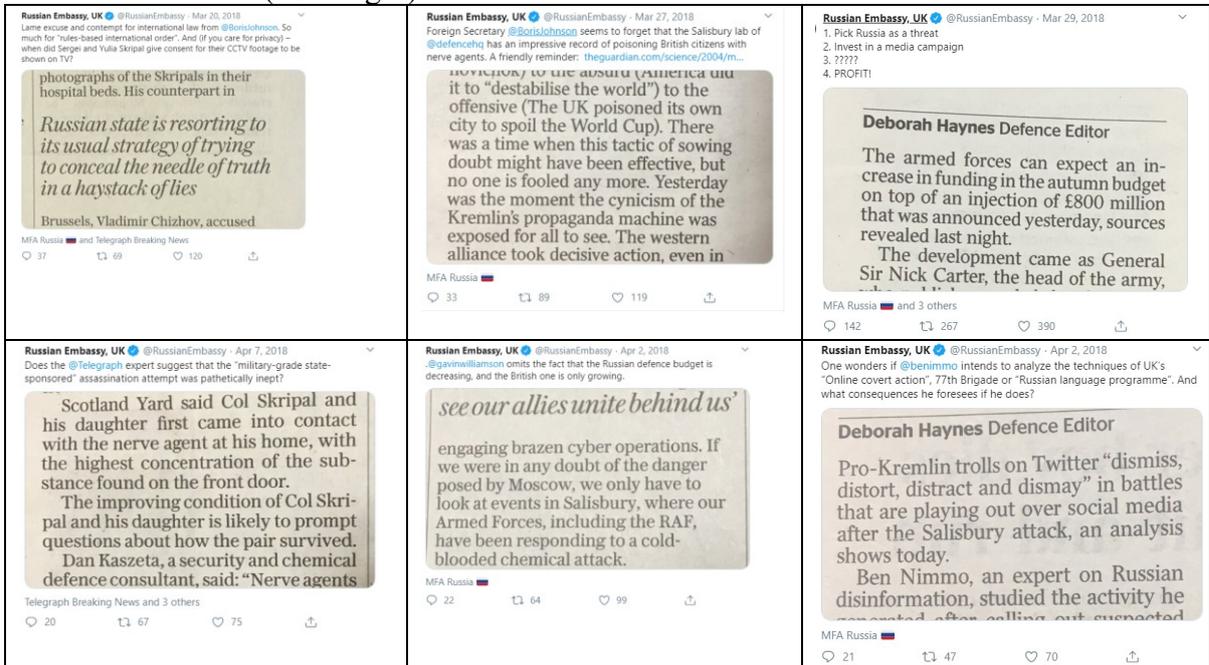
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 9, 2018 Twisting the narrative by calling a MI6 agent 'Russian' media sets an agenda for public opinion and investigation - despite lack of information and logic. Sells better this way.</p>  <p>Guardian news and MFA Russia</p> <p>65 191 268</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 12, 2018 Insults and ultimatums do not qualify as questions. For the British people for groundlessly wrecking relations with Russia?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 3 others</p> <p>268 268 356</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 Good point by @theimes</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others</p> <p>29 79 125</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 17, 2018 When you have an obsession you always start to think everyone else does.</p>  <p>58 146 305</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 13, 2018 Insults and ultimatums do not qualify as questions. For its part, Russia has sent over 60 requests to UK, receiving no meaningful reply.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 9 others</p> <p>116 122 179</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 14, 2018 By the way, it's Britain that is notorious for fogs. @theimes</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Fiona Hamilton</p> <p>62 79 185</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 6, 2018 The answer is: full destruction of Russia's chemical weapons was certified by OPCW in 2017. If UK had intelligence of the opposite, why would it keep silent until now?</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>31 174 215</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 3, 2018 Is this an answer to our question about the lack of evidence in the Salisbury poisoning?</p>  <p>Frances Gibb Legal Editor</p> <p>33 121 195</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 11, 2018 What a shame this sensible approach wasn't tried for the Salisbury poisoning as well.</p>  <p>Francis Elliott Political Editor Deborah Haynes Defence Editor Sam Coates, Catherine Philp Theresa May told President Trump yesterday that Britain would need</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>70 158 297</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 12, 2018 "Nobody can speak on my behalf" says the statement issued by @metpoliceuk on behalf of Yulia Skripal rusemb.org.uk/mapr/6478</p>  <p>56 129 185</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 15, 2018 British version #31. Perhaps they should stick to one to sound more convincing.</p>  <p>Fiona Hamilton Crime & Security Editor</p> <p>Fiona Hamilton and MFA Russia</p> <p>13 49 94</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 6, 2018 The best thing about paranoia is that you don't need to have a logical explanation for your tantrums</p>  <p>Deborah Haynes Defence Editor Francis Elliott Political Editor Fiona Hamilton Crime & Security Editor Ramonda Bergmann, the Latvian defence minister, said that he was alert to the possibility of hostile activity by</p> <p>Fiona Hamilton and 2 others</p> <p>95 378 713</p>

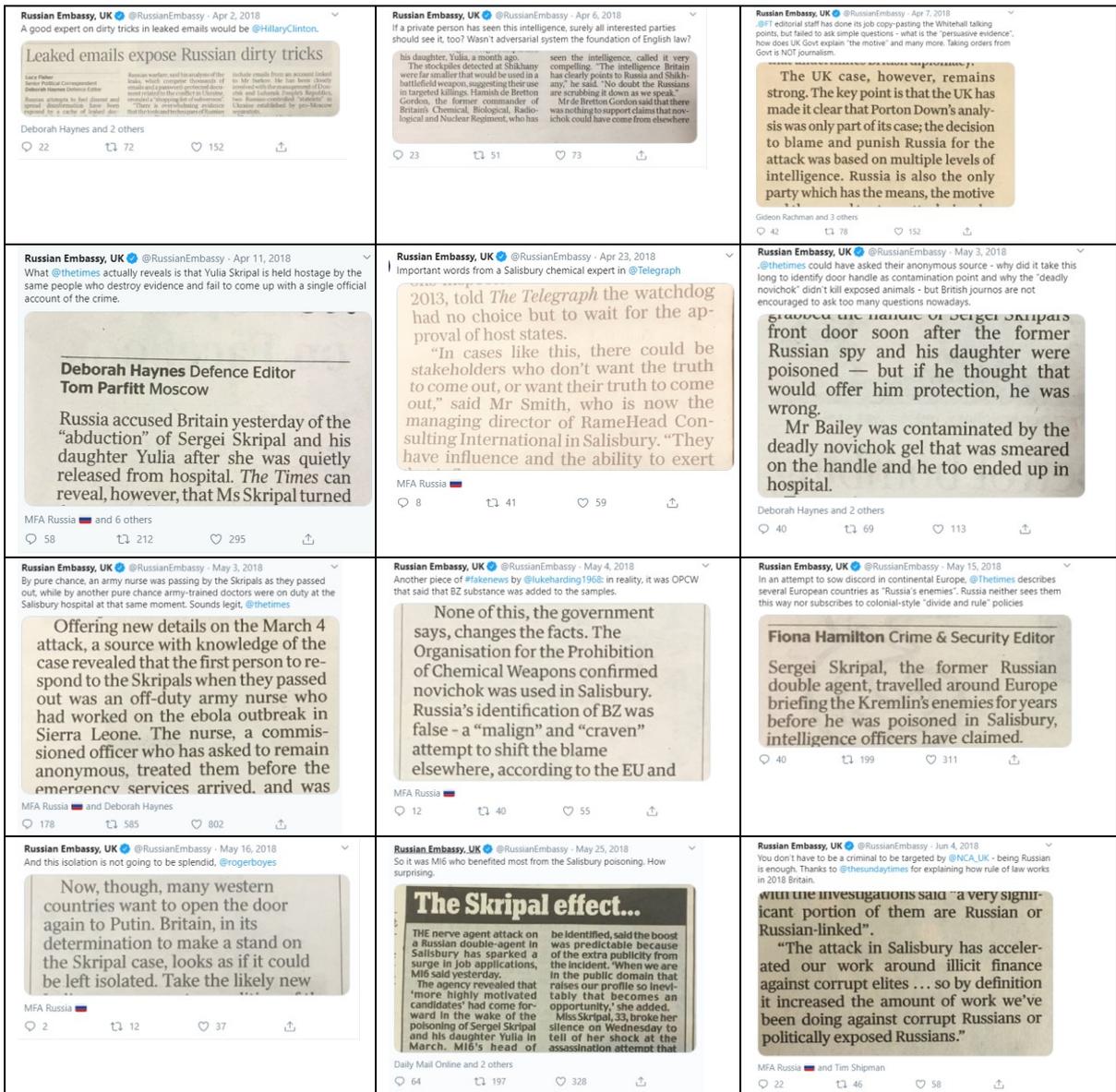
Heavy Text (10 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 9, 2018 Don't put us on the same footing, @guardian</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others</p> <p>19 28 54</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 9, 2018 2014: social media is great. It reveals truth about Russia 2017: social media is evil. It spreads fake news about the West</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 9 others</p> <p>18 146 259</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 Truth is the first casualty</p>  <p>Henry Zeffman Political Reporter Matthew Moore</p> <p>MFA Russia and 3 others</p> <p>129 355 488</p>
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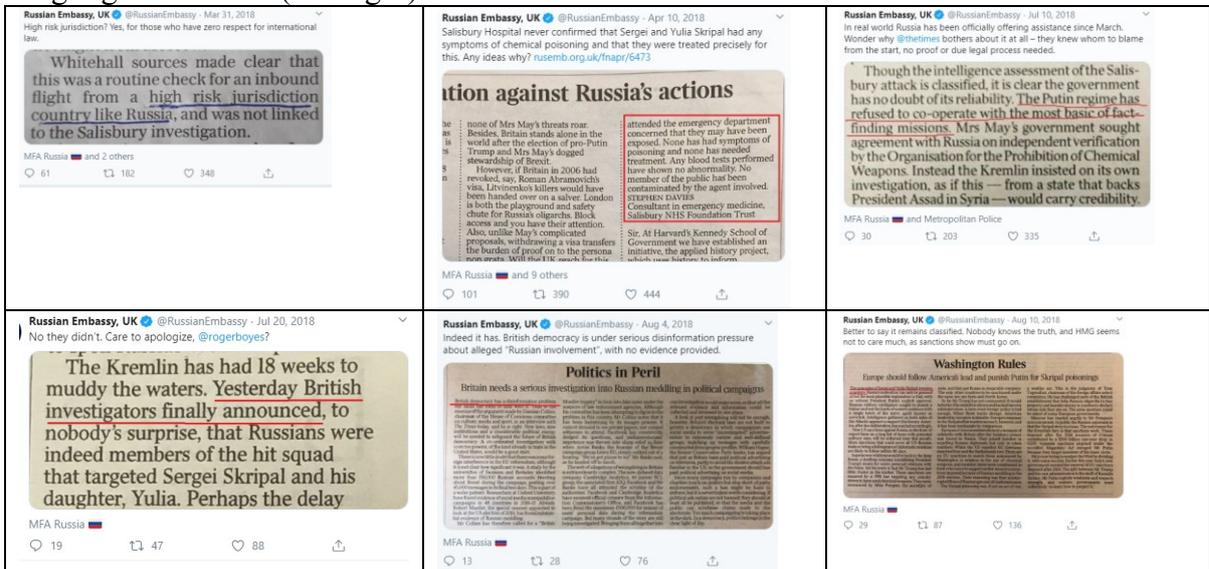


Clear focus in text (18 Images):





Highlighted section (6 Images):



Clear Paper Focus (4 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 22, 2018 Wasn't it actually @BorisJohnson who attacked Russia?</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>45 64 148</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 27, 2018 Can you imagine the world without China, India, Pakistan, Arab nations, S.America, Africa and half of Europe? No - unless you are a patronizing colonialist from @thetimes</p>  <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>116 525 894</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018 Does the Government have any positive agenda at all?</p>  <p>Foreign Office and MFA Russia</p> <p>31 34 87</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018 Embassy press officer comments on the @guardian article concerning a new British anti-Russian strategy: "fusion doctrine" based on Orwellian logic instead of facts. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6519</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others</p> <p>19 75 90</p>		

Appendix J: Digital Media (31 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

Images (10 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 12, 2018 Embassy Press secretary responds to BBC question on Sergei Skripal case rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6415</p>  <p>67 134 107</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 13, 2018 5/7 Without that, there can be no sense in any statements from London. The incident appears to be yet another crooked attempt by the UK authorities to discredit Russia.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and UKinRussia 154 233 270</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 18, 2018 Important: full text of @Amb_Yakovenko exclusive interview for @MailOnline on Russia-UK relations, Sergei Skripal poisoning and more rusemb.org.uk/article/518</p>  <p>MFA Russia 11 87 91</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 26, 2018 Question: The British government is proud of having mobilized some Western partners to expel Russian diplomats in a show of support. How do you assess this coordinated Western policy? Answer: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6436</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 171 96 125</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018 On British media reports concerning the alleged poisoning of @BP_plc CEO Robert Dudley in Russia rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6518</p>  <p>MFA Russia 10 53 78</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 29, 2018 Recent @TheBMA's statement on handling of the Salisbury incident criticizes the Government. That's just one of many questions as the UK's official version is falling apart due to a growing list of discrepancies. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6573</p>  <p>MFA Russia 3 17 21</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 4, 2018 On the "identification of suspects" in Salisbury poisoning: one could welcome some clarity in the case at last. Alas, @TheSun report is based on obscure sources and contains numerous caveats rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6576</p>  <p>MFA Russia 21 23 39</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 4, 2018 According to @guardian, "Russia has sent out a fresh invitation to @theresa_may" to visit the #WorldCup despite the UK "ministerial boycott". Read rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6578 to see if it is true!</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others 11 99 110</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 25, 2018 Sealed box, discarded bottle or perfume bottle broken by bare hand? UK media (and highly likely the government) muddying the waters with fresh and contradictory Amesbury theories – but still putting the blame on Russia</p> <p>Novichok victim found substance disguised as perfume in sealed box</p> <p>Charlie Rowley claims nerve agent that killed his partner was boxed and wrapped up</p>  <p>MFA Russia 35 88 129</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 13, 2018 Glushkov murder case investigation: Again, UK prefers the obfuscating strategy of tabloid leaks. The policy of classifying incidents with Russian nationals in the UK can only be explained as being driven by interests of British secret services. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6652</p>  <p>MFA Russia 18 27 48</p>		

Text (21 Images):

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 10, 2018 Does it imply that Russian businessmen would lose their money and London would lose its credibility?</p> <p>Putin's pals in the firing line: Calls grow for UK to freeze assets of London-based Russian oligarchs named by US as Putin cronies in revenge for poisoned spy plot</p> <p>By Mark Duell and Kate Ferguson and Tim Sculthorpe For Mailonline and Jason Groves for the Daily Mail</p> <p>MFA Russia and Daily Mail Online</p> <p>91 80 120</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 15, 2018 Frankness appreciated!</p> <p>BBC News (UK) @BBCNews</p> <p>"Frankly Russia should go away, it should shut up" - UK Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson asked about Russia's response to its</p> <p>MFA Russia and Gavin Williamson</p> <p>206 403 716</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 30, 2018 A toxic campaign based on "classified" but very reliable evidence on prohibited weapons" still backfires. Will the same be said about the Skripal affair in 15 years?</p> <p>Opinion</p> <p>Fifteen years on, the Iraq war is still poisoning our national life</p> <p>21 80 133</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 16, 2018 Kremlin spokesperson: shocking and unforgivable violation of diplomatic norms</p> <p>BBC News (UK) @BBCNews</p> <p>"Overwhelmingly likely" that Vladimir Putin was personally responsible for ordering nerve agent attack in UK - Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson</p> <p>bbc.in/2FG14Hh</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>204 239 355</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 23, 2018 Sickening personal insults and sexism by @thequentinlets in @mailonline. He didn't even attend Ambassador's press conference - but you can watch it at pcp.tv/w/1NAKERDJWWRGL and make up your own mind.</p> <p>MailOnline RightMinds</p> <p>Mr Yakovenko, who has polluted the Court of St James for seven years, took questions. First journalist selected, surprise surprise, was a blonde in scorching red dress, red shoes (kitten heels) and traffic-light red lipstick.</p> <p>38 73 116</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 31, 2018 Dear @DailyExpress, we are celebrating Easter next week. Please do a bit of research.</p> <p>By John Chapman and Will Stewart</p> <p>VLADIMIR Putin's war of words with the West escalated into war games yesterday.</p> <p>In a show of force,</p> <p>39 103 245</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 4, 2018 22 March: "Porton Down lab @dstimod clearly established that the source of Salisbury toxic agent was Russia" 3 April: "@dstimod never had the task to establish the source of the toxic agent"</p> <p>Foreign Office @foreignoffice</p> <p>Analysis by world-leading experts at Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down made it clear that this was a military-grade Novichok nerve agent produced in Russia. Porton Down is OPCW-certified and designated laboratory.</p> <p>Our experts have precisely identified the nerve agent as a Novichok, not, and has never been, our responsibility to confirm the identity of the agent @skynews @UKNews</p> <p>Перевести с английского</p> <p>03.04.2018, 18:21</p> <p>MFA Russia and 2 others</p> <p>55 362 404</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 23, 2018 "BBC Russian goes to great lengths to explain that "highly likely" stands for "99.9% sure". Sadly, for Russians it means just "maybe, with no proof attached".</p> <p>РУССКАЯ СЛУЖБА</p> <p>Highly likely: как британский английский запутывает иностранцев</p> <p>Борис Максимов</p> <p>BBCRussian.com</p> <p>25 63 123</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 25, 2018 Time to start worrying? Or maybe not.</p> <p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy</p> <p>Defence Secretary @GavinWilliamson said "Russia poses greater challenge than insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan". What do you think really poses greater challenge?</p> <p>16 54 88</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 4, 2018 The plot thickens: how would 100g of liquid or gel look like on a door handle? And how could it just go unnoticed?</p> <p>Skripals poisoned by novichok dose of up to 100g, watchdog says</p> <p>Quantity of nerve agent dose thought to have been used suggests it was</p> <p>Guardian news and 3 others</p> <p>119 210 316</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 29, 2018 Details don't match in the "leaked" versions from 7 April and now.</p> <p>MailOnline News</p> <p>Two doctors with expertise in chemical weapons attacks were on duty at Salisbury District Hospital that afternoon.</p> <p>The pair had recently completed a training course at Porton Down, which enabled them to quickly recognise the symptoms of exposure to a nerve agent.</p> <p>Their expertise and decision making proved invaluable. The Mail on Sunday has been told how these doctors treated the Skripals, and how police officer Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who was also present.</p> <p>The doctors ran enzyme level tests on the three victims which confirmed the use of a nerve agent. They then summoned scientists from nearby Porton Down.</p> <p>Wildest imagination?</p> <p>The testimonies of the medical staff highlight the vital importance of the decisions made at key times: the speedy arrival in intensive care, the heavy sedation used to limit possible brain damage, and the importance of advice, tests and treatments suggested by the Porton Down experts.</p> <p>When the Skripals were found, an opioid overdose was suspected.</p> <p>"We were just told that there were two patients down in the emergency department who were critically unwell and they would be coming up to the unit," recalled ward sister Ms Clark.</p> <p>MFA Russia</p> <p>14 37 51</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 4, 2018 Being paranoid about Russia doesn't mean Russia is also paranoid about you.</p> <p>Britain faces 'full spectrum' of Russian threat for 'years to come', MP's report says</p> <p>Bob Seely MP and 3 others</p> <p>78 203 431</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 5, 2018 Russia has called for a joint investigation into Salisbury from the very start, @BenWallaceMP. That proposal remains on the table.</p> <p>RUSSIA has been called upon to give answers to Britain to help solve the Novichok riddle after two more people were left critical near Salisbury.</p> <p>By Henry Holloway</p> <p>09.07.05 Jul 2018 UPDATED 09.07.05 Jul 2018</p> <p>MFA Russia and 4 others</p> <p>62 136 184</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 19, 2018 "Clear message with plausible deniability" sounds all too British. Like obfuscating anonymous leaks vs contradicting police comments</p> <p>https://www.bbc.co.uk/r</p> <p>Philip Ingram, a former British Army intelligence officer and chemical weapons expert, said the development supported his perception that this was a "professional attack" designed to send a "political message" - adding that it happened two weeks before the Russian election.</p> <p>Daniel Sandford and 7 others</p> <p>12 17 48</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 18, 2018 Embassy Press Officer's comment on anti-Russian statement by Minister of State @MarkFieldUK. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6630</p> <p>Global Britain-supporting the Rules Based International System</p> <p>Minister Field delivers speech in the Philippines on the Rules Based International System</p> <p>Published 17 August 2018 From: Foreign & Commonwealth Office and The Rt Hon Mark Field MP</p> <p>Delivered on: 17 August 2018 (Transcript)</p> <p>MFA Russia and 5 others</p> <p>20 18 30</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 28, 2018 .@SkyNews Are face recognition experts also shown photos of Porton Down employees? rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6641</p> <p>news.sky.com</p> <p>"They don't concentrate on the obvious, the greying hair or the moustache or the glasses, they look at the eyes, the mouth, the ears, the things that don't change. They can recognise a face from the tiniest glimpse of part of it."</p> <p>Mr Neville said it was likely the super recognisers have also been shown photographs of known British agents suspected of operating in the UK</p> <p>Home Office and 4 others</p> <p>5 22 35</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 28, 2018 .@SkyNews Are face recognition experts also shown photos of Porton Down employees? rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6641</p> <p>news.sky.com</p> <p>"They don't concentrate on the obvious, the greying hair or the moustache or the glasses, they look at the eyes, the mouth, the ears, the things that don't change. They can recognise a face from the tiniest glimpse of part of it."</p> <p>Mr Neville said it was likely the super recognisers have also been shown photographs of known British agents suspected of operating in the UK</p> <p>Home Office and 4 others</p> <p>5 22 35</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 8, 2018 Russia is fully prepared to act once we receive a proper request with supporting evidence. Public insults not the best way to secure cooperation.</p> <p>www.theguardian.com</p> <p>denials by Moscow. The Kremlin says it sees no reason to pursue Petrov and Boshirov, who presented genuine Russian passports when they flew on 2 March from Moscow to Gatwick airport.</p> <p>MFA Russia and The Guardian</p> <p>41 115 223</p>

Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 8, 2018
Too many coincidences for a natural course of a police investigation.

www.theguardian.com

Glushkov is now thought to have survived a previous attempt to kill him by poisoning in 2013, the Guardian can reveal. Detectives are reinvestigating the

13 22 48

Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 11, 2018
For once we agree with @loWBobSeely, Russia has always been calling for simplified visa regime to improve people2people contacts. As for fight vs corruption, unfortunately, UK has become more of a haven for those hiding from justice—incl. dozens of suspects wanted by Russian police

www.theguardian.com

The 'golden visa' deal: We have in effect been selling off British citizenship to the rich

The move will also be welcomed by MPs who have criticised the visa system. Writing on the Conservative Home website last week, Bob

Read more

MFA Russia

11 14 47

Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 27, 2018
Do you think @bellingcat and @the_ins_ru are special structures of @DefenceHQ?

Tweets MPs Delete

DT Gavin Williamson MP: The true identity of one of the Salisbury suspects has been revealed to be a Russian Colonel. I want to thank @L... @the_ins_ru @bellingcat @pffops @_prLAX 7:22 PM · Sep 26, 2018

Deleted tweet from Gavin Williamson MP: L... Politics is the only comprehensive collection of deleted tweets by politicians that offers a unique insight into what they hoped you didn't see. politics.co.uk

Gavin Williamson and 7 others

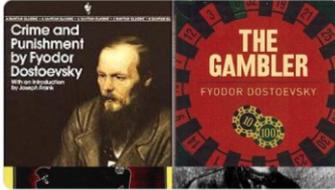
87 44 81

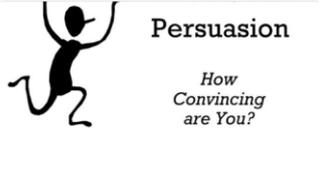
Public Polls (6 Images):



Appendix L: Humour and Sarcasm (26 Images)

Source: Russian Embassy in London Twitter Account. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RussianEmbassy> [accessed Jan. - July 2020].

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 11, 2018 Does Russia's dialing code 007 make James Bond a 'Russian spy'?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 2 others 108 replies 303 retweets 646 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 14, 2018 The temperature of   relations drops to -2.3, but we are not afraid of cold weather.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 510 replies 2K retweets 3K likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 16, 2018 Courtesy of @Telegraph: British humour</p>  <p><i>'We're sending you to Moscow immediately. You're the ideal man to be expelled.'</i></p> <p>25 replies 93 retweets 195 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 17, 2018 British humour, courtesy of @thetimes</p>  <p>12 replies 45 retweets 96 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 18, 2018 In absence of evidence, we definitely need Poirot in Salisbury!</p>  <p>1.2K replies 2.3K retweets 4.3K likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 20, 2018 British humour: can it also apply to the fishy Skripal case? @thetimes</p>  <p>29 replies 34 retweets 74 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 29, 2018 .@BorisJohnson compared Skripal case with Crime and Punishment: good taste in books, but Raskolnikov did have a motive, and Porfiry Petrovich had evidence, not five PowerPoint slides from UK Embassy.</p>  <p>MFA Russia and UKinRussia 67 replies 270 retweets 465 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Mar 30, 2018 MFA spox Zakharova: We get reports aplenty to know how your famous 'solidarity' looks like - a result of crude pressure, and mostly not from UK proper. A number of countries have apologized to Russia for bowing to outside pressure.</p>  <p>30 replies 89 retweets 127 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 11, 2018 Russian Prosecution @Genproc: Russia has received not a single request for legal aid, neither from the UK, nor from other countries, over the Salisbury poisoning investigation.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 29 replies 32 retweets 48 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 13, 2018 A bombshell or a dead cat? Read our comment on @marksedwill letter to NATO's @jensstoltenberg re Salisbury poisoning: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6483</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 8 others 32 replies 95 retweets 126 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 18, 2018 British humour (courtesy of @Telegraph)</p>  <p>Virgin Media and TalkTalk Group 22 replies 93 retweets 199 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Apr 25, 2018 British humour from 1980s</p>  <p>13 replies 18 retweets 38 likes</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · May 7, 2018 When in doubt what to do, blame Russia</p> <p>NEWS</p> <p>UK Weather: The 'Roast from Russia' makes British Bank Holiday hotter than Hawaii but thunderstorms are coming</p> <p>Daily Mirror and MFA Russia 76 replies 429 retweets 951 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jun 1, 2018 Briefing for MPs' staff heading to Russia for the World Cup resembles old Soviet 'commissions on trips abroad', even though based on the advice of a biased MP for @BorisJohnson. Come to Russia and see how far the scary stories are from the reality! rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6552</p> <p>SPIES!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DON'T TALK. THE ENEMY HAS EARS EVERYWHERE. DON'T imagine that every one who SPEAKS ENGLISH is to be trusted, and that every UNIFORM covers a FRIEND. DON'T exchange confidences with CASUAL COMPANIONS or when travelling at home or abroad. DON'T trust STRANGERS who write to you, who offer gifts or hospitality, or who tell you their secrets. <p>PoliticsHome and 4 others 42 replies 41 retweets 78 likes</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Jul 13, 2018 MFA spox Zakharova: hoping that Amesbury incident will be thoroughly and diligently investigated, its results presented to the public and those to blame brought to justice</p>  <p>Dstl and 3 others 8 replies 11 retweets 32 likes</p>

<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 24, 2018 Advice to Russian citizens: when planning trips to #Stonehenge and #Salisbury, consider the risk of unwittingly drawing attention of British secret services struggling to produce evidence of Russian involvement in #Skripal poisoning.</p>  <p>Home Office and 9 others 108 381 677</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Aug 20, 2018 Five months of silence. Maybe it's time to speak up? Full comment here: rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6631</p>  <p>Home Office and 7 others 9 16 34</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 6, 2018 Men "working with the most deadly military grade toxin of high purity". How many differences can you spot?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 7 others 646 1.5K 2.5K</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 7, 2018 And these people are accusing us of laughing off a tragedy</p>  <p>MFA Russia 20 36 90</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 8, 2018 Old evidence - "highly likely"; new evidence - "almost certainly". Very convincing indeed. gov.uk/government/new...</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 5 others 16 50 96</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 10, 2018 Embassy to @ukhomeoffice @sajidjavid: If you have "crystal clear" evidence of Russian state involvement in #Salisbury, why not make it public?</p>  <p>MFA Russia and 6 others 33 71 147</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 10, 2018 Embassy to @ukhomeoffice @sajidjavid: Russia is not a threat to Britain and you know it. Rhetoric of "defending ourselves" with "all covert and overt powers to bear on Russia" is provocative and unhelpful.</p>  <p>49 117 240</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 12, 2018 A series of official statements on "massive retaliation" vs Russia are reckless, provocative and unfounded. We urge UK elite to return to common sense. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6651</p>  <p>Home Office and 7 others 49 136 225</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 20, 2018 2/2 MFA spokesperson #Zakharova: The world seems to be in Orwell's anti-utopia "1984" due to enormous amount of disinformation in UK, manipulation and fake news.</p>  <p>MFA Russia 35 83 115</p>
<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 17, 2018 Faced with the realities of #Brexit, UK is desperate to convince its partners of the need for a tougher sanctions regime against Russia, resorting to insinuations, unverified facts and media leaks. rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/6654</p>  <p>MFA Russia 40 43 86</p>	<p>Russian Embassy, UK @RussianEmbassy · Sep 20, 2018 1/2 MFA spokesperson #Zakharova: Salisbury poisoning has become a sort of Loch Ness monster. No one has seen any evidence, but people talk about it and faked "clues" appear regularly. Read the full text (in Russian): rus.rusemb.org.uk/fnapr/5518</p>  <p>MFA Russia and Hugo Rikkind 51 70 119</p>	