

Former Russian Spy Incident in Britain: Facts and Reactions

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Toby Melville / Reuters

On Sunday, Sergei Skripal, a 66-year-old former Russian spy, was found unconscious on a bench outside a shopping center in Salisbury, England, after exposure to what police said was an unknown substance.

Skripal was arrested in 2004 by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) on suspicion of betraying dozens of Russian agents to British intelligence services. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison in 2006 after a secret trial, but was pardoned four years later as part of a spy swap.

The incident recalls the poisoning of ex-KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko with radioactive polonium-210 in London in 2006.

Here's what we know so far:

- Skripal was found alongside his 33-year-old daughter, Yulia. Both have been hospitalized and are in a critical condition.
- An emergency service worker has also been hospitalized.

Reactions:

- British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson in a speech to parliament warned “governments around the world that no attempt to take innocent life on UK soil will go unsanctioned or unpunished.”

"We don't know exactly what has taken place in Salisbury, but if it's as bad as it looks, it is another crime in the litany of crimes that we can lay at Russia's door," he said.

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He added that if there was evidence of Russian state involvement, it would be unlikely Britain would participate in the World Cup in Russia in a “normal way.”

- Head of the Federation Council’s committee on international affairs Konstantin Kosachev called Johnson’s statement “unacceptable.”

“To sound an official version of events that has not been verified but is ‘politically tasty’ is first of all dishonest,” he [told](#) the Interfax news agency. “Secondly, it violates the principle of the presumption of innocence, and thirdly it puts pressure on investigators.”

- Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the situation “tragic” and said the Kremlin had no information about the incident.

- Russia’s Embassy in London called for an end to the “demonization of Russia,” in an online [statement](#).

- Andrei Lugovoi, who is suspected of being involved in the poisoning of Litvinenko but is now a State Duma deputy, [said](#) the incident could be used to antagonize Russia.

“The English suffer from phobias. When something happens with a Russian citizen [they] instantly search for a Russian trail.”

“There are unwritten rules between intelligence agencies, which are largely observed. Skripal was convicted of treason, but he was pardoned by the president in 2010 and extradited to Britain in return for our supposedly exposed agents,” he added.

“That means there was an agreement between our intelligence agencies. Going after someone who’s already been pardoned is absurd.”

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