The Invalidity of the 1999 Russia Bombings Conspiracy Theory

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**Abstract**

This article, partly on the basis of previously-unconsidered primary sources and contemporary reporting, reexamines the conspiracy theory that developed regarding the 1999 Russian apartment bombings. It concludes, first, that the Russian government had net-negative incentive to carry out the conspiracy of which it is accused. Second, had the alleged conspiracy nevertheless been undertaken, it would have very likely unraveled; its failure to do so indicates that it probably was not undertaken in the first place. And third, the overwhelming bulk of the evidence indicates that there was not a real bomb at Ryazan.

**Keywords**

Russia, conspiracy theory, apartment bombings, Ryazan

On 31 August 1999, as fighters of the Wahhabi-Salafi 'Chechen Republic of Ichkeria' (ChRI) were retreating from Dagestan and Russian forces were preparing a counterattack, a bomb exploded inside a Moscow toy store. It was followed by bombings of apartment buildings in Buynaksk (4 September), Moscow (9 and 13 September), and Volgodonsk (16 September). Collectively, these attacks killed or wounded more than 2000 people. Because they took place as ChRI forces were being driven out of Dagestan, because the Buynaksk apartment building housed the families of soldiers fighting against the ChRI invasion of Dagestan, and because the ChRI already had a well-established record of terrorism, suspicion immediately fell upon the ChRI.

However, from the beginning, a small fringe suggested that the Russian government (GoR) had conducted the bombings, in order to justify the renewal of war with the ChRI and/or the cancellation of the upcoming elections. This conspiracy theory was developed primarily by Western and Russian journalists (especially from *Novaya Gazeta*), by the oligarchs Vladimir Gusinskiy and Boris Berezovskiy, by the defector Aleksandr Litvinenko, by Sergey Yushenkov and his Liberal Russia party, by a variety of other oppositional and/or US-backed groups in Russia, and by internationally-directed US state media.

The conspiracy theory became, and remains to this day, a major pillar of liberal-opposition narratives in Russia and of anti-Russian narratives in the West. (Insofar as those are even separate things.) For instance, *Radio Svoboda* (at the intersection of those two streams), in the decade from August 2014 to July 2024 ran at least nine articles primarily or fully devoted to the promotion of the conspiracy theory, and at least another 38 articles and interviews discussing it to some degree as plausible, likely, or certain. See *Appendix: Radio Svoboda's promotion of the conspiracy theory*.

As Robert Otto's recent treatment of the subject puts it, the conspiracy theory is kept alive primarily by two things: the claims of one Mikhail Trepashkin, and an incident in Ryazan. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Trepashkin's claims — that a police sketch of a perpetrator of the Moscow bombings resembles someone (Vladimir Romanovich) who was supposedly linked to the FSB — are well enough discredited by Otto's presentation of them:

* Aside from one witness (Mark Blyumenfel'd), "practically all" witnesses aligned with the government's identification of the man in question as Achemez Gochiyayev. [[2]](#footnote-2)
* Trepashkin supposedly recognized Romanovich in fall 1999, which would mean that he inexplicably waited four years before making the claim in November 2003. [[3]](#footnote-3)
* Trepashkin himself claims only that he had "got the impression that Romanovich is somehow connected to the FSB" when he (Trepashkin) was not authorized to interrogate Romanovich and confiscate his belongings in the course of an investigation in the mid-1990s. [[4]](#footnote-4)
* Trepashkin was fired by the FSB in 1997, [[5]](#footnote-5) casting doubt on his subsequent motives and impartiality.
* By 1998, Trepashkin had allied himself with Berezovskiy, [[6]](#footnote-6) the main financier of the bombings conspiracy theory — *inter alia*,serving Berezovskiy as a Duma aide in early 2000 [[7]](#footnote-7) — which entirely eliminates Trepashkin's credibility.

The Ryazan matter appears, at least superficially, rather more complicated. In the evening of 22 September 1999, residents of a Ryazan apartment building saw strangers moving something into their building's abandoned basement. The police were called, and upon arrival discovered something that appeared to be a bomb. The building was evacuated for the night, and a citywide manhunt was launched — only to be called off late in the afternoon of 24 September, when FSB Director Nikolay Patrushev announced that the bomb was a dummy and that the narrowly-averted terrorist attack was actually an exercise.

Exploiting Russians' shock and anger, the above-listed conspiracy-theorists argued that Patrushev's claim was a flimsy cover-up, that the Ryazan incident was an actual (aborted) terrorist attack carried out by the GoR, and thus that all of the apartment bombings that actually went off were probably also the work of the GoR. The most elaborate and famous presentation of this theory is *The FSB Blows Up Russia*, [[8]](#footnote-8) coauthored by Litvinenko and the Soviet emigre Yuriy Fel’shtinskiy (henceforth L&F).

In this article, I demonstrate that the conspiracy theory's superficial plausibility is actually built upon the distortion and withholding of information. A full and accurate understanding of the available evidence — primary sources, contemporary reporting, and citation-backed claims, which are shockingly rare in discussions of this topic — makes clear that the theory is virtually impossible. As does a sober consideration of the logical coherence of the conspiracy theory's allegations. (Citations and consistency are sorely lacking in many presentations of the conspiracy theory, especially L&F's. Fel'shtsinkiy's subsequent conspiriological work has expanded in scope but retained this artistic license. [[9]](#footnote-9))

 First, the GoR would never have carried out the alleged conspiracy, as it had net-negative incentive to do so. Second, had the alleged conspiracy nevertheless been undertaken, it would have very likely unraveled; that it did not do so indicates that it probably was not undertaken in the first place. And third, the overwhelming bulk of the evidence indicates that there was not a real bomb at Ryazan, and thus that the conspiracy theory is indeed invalid.

# The GoR would never have carried out the alleged conspiracy, as it had net-negative incentive

The conspiracy theory is fundamentally implausible for the simple reason that the GoR had no motive to do what it is accused of doing. In fact, on the whole, it was strongly incentivized to **not** do what it supposedly did.

## A large risk, a large cost, and thus negative expected-value

The whole conspiracy would have had a huge risk-cost, the risk emanating from at least two sources.

The *first source of risk* is the large chance of at least one conspirator defecting.

The alleged conspiracy would have required an **absolute minimum** of eight conspirators (not counting the mastermind, who is assumed to be guaranteed to not defect).

**1 conspirator**: Patrushev.

**1 conspirator**: (At the very least) one supporting officer in the FSB’s Moscow HQ. This officer would procure the sugar, hexogen, detonators, cars, money, etc. This officer was also the individual at the other end of the phone call that was (per the conspiracy theory) intercepted coming out of Ryazan. And this officer is also necessary to remove most/all of the hexogen explosive from the bags **after** they are collected from Ryazan by the FSB but **before** they are given to the Moscow laboratories where they were tested and found to contain no hexogen.

**6 conspirators**: 2 teams of 3 FSB officers each. According to the conspiracy theory, there were at least 3 officers in Ryazan, and there would have almost certainly needed to be at **least** one other team to carry out the string of bombings that the conspiracy theory ascribes to the GoR. As illustrated in the left-hand map below, a single team would have only:

* 3 days between Moscow (31 August) and Buynaksk in Dagestan (4 September)
* 4 days between Buynaksk (4 September) and Moscow (9 September)
* 2 days between Moscow (13 September) and Volgodonsk in Rostov Oblast (16 September)
* 5 days between Volgodonsk (16 September) and Ryazan (22 September)

This is obviously an absurd itinerary. Furthermore, while it would have been theoretically possible to make these trips in the given amounts of time, it would **not** be possible — especially in the period of 13-16 September — for the bombers to also engage in the leisurely sort of behavior that the conspiracy theory claims (and actually requires) that they did. The theory claims that the FSB officers took their time carrying out their work, renting many apartments — at least two in Ryazan alone (L&F p74-75) — in the target cities prior to the attacks.And that they stayed around for more than a day after the attacks — which is baffling behavior, but without which there can be no risk of the officers’ capture in Ryazan, and thus no reason, within the context of the conspiracy theory, for Patrushev to make his announcement about exercises. This lacadaisical behavior would not be possible for a single team frantically rushing back and forth across Russia. However, if there were **two** teams (right-hand map), then Team A could handle Moscow 31 Aug, Moscow 9 Sep, Moscow 13 Sep, and Ryazan 22 Sep, while Team B would handle Buynaksk 4 Sep and Volgodonsk 16 Sep. This is much more plausible.



The problem is that each of these (at least) eight conspirators would have been at fairly high risk of defection. Each was being asked to do something both morally atrocious and personally quite risky. Morally atrocious, because the conspiracy was aimed at the murder of hundreds and potentially thousands of Russian civilians, including the families of Russian soldiers. Personally risky, because the punishment for those responsible, if caught, would almost certainly be extremely severe. And there was a significant chance of being caught, either through detection (see below) or through the defection of another conspirator (for the same reasons listed here: moral opposition, or fear of severe punishment following detection or another conspirator's defection)

Additionally, an FSB officer approached with a request/demand to join the conspiracy would have no way of knowing whether or not this was a trap to root out unreliable elements. The officer would also have to consider the possibility that, even if no one betrayed the overall plot, the ringleader(s) — who were evidently altogether morally depraved — might scapegoat certain conspirators as part of the basic plan or in the event of something going wrong. In short, an officer roped into the plot would not have any very good options, but defecting would be by far the least bad option.

This is especially the case because even an anonymous defection would have been enough to unravel the whole plot. For instance, the defector might call the police from a public phone, warning of a bomb that has already been planted, and also giving some sort of identifying password or number; then, after the bomb has been found and disarmed, call the police again, provide the password/code to demonstrate that the defector is the same person who called before (and is thus credible), and tell the police the details of the plot, including the identities of the conspirators. The same password/code could then be repeated a third time, when the plot is unraveled, to identify oneself as the whistleblower, thereby avoiding punishment and becoming a national hero.

As a result of these strong incentives — both moral and self-interested — pushing for defection, the probability of each conspirator defecting is probably well above 10%. Yet even if we set it implausibly low, at 10%, this would result in a 57% chance of someone defecting.

Similar issues are probably the reason that I have been unable to find a verified historical false-flag attack that comes even close to the body count of the apartment bombings (over 2000 injured or killed, a number that would have been far higher if Ryazan had succeeded and/or other attacks had been carried out subsequently — and the conspiracy theory provides no basis for assuming that Ryazan was meant to be the last). In fact, of the seven verified incriminatory state-executed false-flag attacks that I have been able to identify, not a single one involved casualties on the perpetrators' side. See *Appendix: The Historical Record of False-Flag Attacks*.

The only one that involved any casualties at all was the Gleiwitz Incident, part of the larger Himmler Plan in which the Germans fabricated grounds for war with Poland. But the casualties were concentration camp inmates who were killed by Germans, dressed as Poles, and left behind as evidence of Polish responsibility. And the only attack that was **intended** (or at least expected) to cause casualties (a relatively small number, some potentially fatal) on the perpetrators' own side, the Mukden Incident, was carried out by rogue elements (the highest-ranking conspirator was a colonel), not by the central government. In fact, the central government (specifically the Minister of War) explicitly forbade the plan, although the major general who was ordered to stop it instead intentionally allowed it to go ahead.

Most likely, the general lack of 'friendly fire' is a result of the plotters' own moral opposition to it, their understanding that it increases the risk of conspirators' defection (as explained above), and/or their recognition that it would not even increase the effectiveness of the operations (see below). This is particularly striking because some of the plotters under consideration here are Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, who were — to put it mildly — willing to make strategically-questionable sacrifices and to carry out morally- and legally-dubious actions.

Alongside defection, the *second source of risk* for the plot would have been the large chance of the perpetrators being identified/caught. In general, the perpetrators of terrorist attacks are usually or at least frequently identified, whether caught in the act or tracked down by the ensuing investigation. In this case, the conspiracy theorists' version of the Ryazan incident demonstrates just how easy it was for the plotters to be caught, particularly as the Russian authorities and public were on increasing alert with each new attack. Supposedly, the FSB officers were seen by multiple witnesses as they planted their bomb in a well-lit area in the early evening, and thus identified and tracked down in just a couple days.

Each hypothetical terrorist attack must be assumed to carry a risk well above 10% of its perpetrators being caught/identified, and the conspiracy thereby ultimately revealed. Moreover, per the conspiracy theory, there is no reason to believe that Ryazan was the last attack planned. Nevertheless, if we assume that each attack carries only a 10% risk of detection, and also that there were only 6 attacks planned (the abortive one just happening to also be the last), this would result in a 47% chance of detection.

And with the risks of defection and detection combined, the prospects for the conspiracy become downright dire. Even using the **extremely** optimistic 10% probabilities laid out above, the chance of defection and/or detection is 77% — a figure that rises exponentially if the parameters are shifted even slightly from their most minimally-plausible values:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| parameters, ranging from bare possible/plausible minimum to more moderate assumptions | % chance of the conspiracy unraveling |
| conspirators | defection probability | planned attacks | detection probability |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 8 | .10 | 6 | .10 | 77.12 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 9 | .15 | 7 | .15 | 92.57 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | .20 | 8 | .20 | 98.20 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 11 | .25 | 9 | .25 | 99.68 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 12 | .30 | 10 | .30 | 99.96 |

But even a 77% chance of failure should be enough to increase each conspirator's defection incentive/probability well above the originally-assumed, extremely conservative 10% — increasing the chance of collapse even further. Defection-incentive, defection-chance, and collapse-chance should, in theory, recursively raise one another up to 100%.

In fact, even if the hypothetical conspirators are assumed to be entirely self-interested, their only game-theoretically correct move is defection. The situation resembles the classic Prisoners' Dilemma, except there are more than two players (increasing the chance of someone defecting), and the crime has not yet been committed (meaning that defection probably eliminates the penalty altogether and might even entail a positive reward).

Prisoners' Dilemma:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | B |
|  |  | collude | defect |
| A | collude | -10 (for A) | -10 (for B) | -100 | 0 |
| defect | 0 | -100 | -50 | -50 |

Conspirators' Dilemma:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | all other conspirators |
|  |  | collude | defect |
| A | collude | -47 \* | -47 \* | -100 | 0 |
| defect | 0 | -100 | 0 | 0 |

\* This is the risk of external detection that remains even if none of the conspirators defect. It is set at 47% in line with the above-described maximally-optimistic assumptions.

Thus, there actually is no dilemma at all. Each player pursuing what is best for himself — defection — will also yield the collectively-optimal outcome. Even a strictly self-interested conspirator has only one correct move, which is made all the more imperative by the knowledge that the same goes for all the other conspirators, who all know that the same goes for the first conspirator, etc...

Ultimately, then, the hypothetical conspiracy's chance of collapse is somewhere between 77% and 100%, leaning heavily towards the latter.

## The availability of far less risky/costly alternatives

But perhaps this plot — quite likely to fail, and certain to be disastrous if it does — was nevertheless the best option available for accomplishing its purpose? No, not at all.

First, if the masterminds were really so insistent on blowing up hundreds (potentially thousands) of their own people, they could still have done so without having **actual FSB officers** do it. Various criminal organizations really did carry out various bombings throughout the 1990s, and a few attacks could presumably have been ordered by the plotters (via dead drops, FSB contacts in organized crime, etc.), requiring the indirect involvement of only one or two officers, rather than the direct involvement of at least six. Even if these attacks were less likely to succeed and the perpetrators were more likely to get caught, this option would be far preferable because of its drastically lower potential downside.

More importantly, it is incomprehensible why the plotters would want false-flag attacks that were so lethal. Even if we assume that the invasion of Dagestan, and the deaths of the Russian soldiers and civilians who repelled it, were not enough justification for a Kremlin that (per the conspiracy theory) sought war in Chechnya and a 'tightening of the screws' throughout Russia, it is still unclear why the attacks required such a high body count.

Again, the seven listed false-flag attacks were more or less devoid of casualties on the perpetrators' side. Only in the Maynila Incident was there even a **claim** that the 'attacker' (Finland) had inflicted casualties, and the apparent lack of any **actual** casualties proved no obstacle to this. Yet this lack of real or even alleged casualties does not appear to have at all reduced the attacks' effectiveness: of the seven incidents, four succeeded in their objectives, two appear to have succeeded, and one failed because its operatives were captured. In no case is there any indication that the lack of claimed/actual casualties at all diminished the operations' effectiveness. Thus, there does not appear to be any historical precedent for state authorities believing that their false-flag attacks must involve the injury or death of their own people — let alone the mass death of civilians — in order to be successful. Nor does this appear to be the case.

It is thus incomprehensible that the supposed GoR plotters would have opted for the conspiracy of which they are accused, when far-less-bloody — or altogether bloodless — false-flag attacks are more ethically palatable, less costly if revealed, therefore less risky, yet just as effective.

## The net-negative effects of the hypothetical conspiracy's 'success'

So the plot was immoral, risky, and costly, yet selected despite the availability of alternatives — more ethical, and less risky and costly — that would have just the same effect. But at least the effect was itself strongly positive for the plotters? No, this is not the case, either.

The conspiracy theory alleges that, after semi-rogue ChRI elements invaded Dagestan, and fighting broke out there between them and Russian forces, senior figures in the GoR decided that the Russian public was still not sufficiently supportive of an invasion of Chechnya (and perhaps of Putin's upcoming candidacy for president). And these figures decided that manufactured terrorist attacks would be the way to rectify this deficit. And not just one or two attacks for show, but rather a whole string (at least six) of them, each killing hundreds of people and maiming hundreds more.

Yet such attacks, at least after the first one or two, would have been outright counterproductive. After the first one or two, any additional rallying around the flag is going to be marginal at best; it is simply incomprehensible that someone would support the war, or the government, much more after the sixth attack than after the fourth or fifth. But there are some things that **will** begin to rise with every further attack — especially with attacks that (again, unlike every major documented false-flag attack) kill hundreds of people. Those things are panic, a loss of confidence and trust in the government, and potentially a loss of support for the war.

As the most-read newspaper in Russia noted on 1 October 1999, the Second Chechen War held the promise of certain benefits to Putin, but:

…plenty of dangers lie in wait for the Prime Minister. The foremost of them: the fact that public opinion quickly elevates idols, but just as quickly overthrows them. If Chechen extremists start to blow up house after house, if coffins again start returning from Chechnya, if a tide of refugees floods Russia, then Putin will hardly be a serious pretender to the throne. And those who stop wars have, in Russia, always had the best chance at the laurels. [[10]](#footnote-10)

The same conclusion (regarding not only the negative net-benefit of the supposed Ryazan attack, but also the elevated risk of its supposed perpetrators being caught) was drawn, *inter alia*, by Yevgeniy Ikhlov of the (US-backed) organization For Human Rights:

To me, Fel'shtinskiy's theory seems extremely unlikely. The explosions in Ryazan were [i.e. would have been, if carried out by the GoR] entirely excessive/redundant. If everything around you is blowing up, if the apartment buildings in Buynaksk, Volgodonsk, and Moscow were all blown up, and now another apartment building in Ryazan has exploded — it demonstrates the government's paralysis. The government's task is not at all to shell-shock the public. If it wanted the public to sanction a war in Chechnya, then an entirely chauvinistic/xenophobic attitude towards the Chechens was already present after the Moscow explosions. After that, a Ryazan terrorist attack would have been not only excessive/redundant, but also dangerous — they might have gotten away with two or three explosions, but on the fourth they might have been caught.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Contemporary public opinion polling similarly indicates that, after the first one or two attacks — certainly after the first five (Ryazan would have been the sixth) — additional attacks presented the GoR with a negligible upside and a massive downside.

A 20-24 August 1999 poll by VTsIOM [[12]](#footnote-12) found mixed support — actually 4% net opposition — even just for "conducting airstrikes against terrorist groups in Chechnya and Dagestan". However, within a month, the escalation of fighting in Dagestan and the apartment bombings throughout Russia had dramatically changed things: a 17-21 September VTsIOM poll [[13]](#footnote-13) found that support for "active military operations against the militants in Chechnya" had 61% net support. Thus, support for the war was already very high. While the first one or two attacks had probably made an impact alongside the invasion of Dagestan, there was little need and limited room for support to be further boosted by additional attacks.

Moreover, their effect was now more likely to be outright negative. Although 72% of the population in the late September poll supported military action, 40% was in favor "only if the population's protection from terrorists is guaranteed". Thus, while there was little need (or even room) for additional war support, and no reason to believe that yet more bombings would create such support, it **does** appear that additional bombings could have undermined much of the military campaign's (and/or government's) base of support. Russians expected their government to protect them from the terroristic retaliation with which the ChRI was threatening to meet any Russian offensive, and many (at least declaratively) conditioned their support for any offensive upon this expectation.

Thus, while one or two bloodless false-flag attacks would at least be intelligible as providing some Machiavellian benefit to their plotters, a plan to carry out **at least** six extraordinarily bloody attacks makes no sense, as both polling and common sense dictate that the later attacks would provide virtually no benefit to the plotters, while causing significant damage to them.

## Summary

To review, then, the apartment bombings conspiracy theory alleges that elements of the GoR concocted a plot that: was egregiously immoral, far more so than the false-flag attacks carried out by e.g. Stalin and even Hitler; had a chance of unraveling that was at least 77% and probably closer to 100%; would have disastrous consequences for the conspirators, perhaps their institutions, and potentially all of Russia, were it to unravel; would be no more effective in accomplishing its goals than alternatives that were less ethically bankrupt, less risky, and less potentially costly; and would provide — at least after the first couple attacks — negligible benefit to the conspirators, and instead on the whole do outright harm to both the GoR and its war effort.

In short, the conspiracy's masterminds took an immense and unnecessary risk, in a hugely and pointlessly evil act, for the sake of the opportunity **to harm themselves**.

If, hypothetically, senior elements of the GoR really did want to carry out a false-flag attack for the reasons alleged by the conspiracy theory, they would have done something like this: Execute one or two spectacular but largely- or entirely-bloodless explosions that 'could' have caused great harm, but intentionally did not, then launch a 'retaliatory' war while trumpeting the successful prevention of one or two other purported terrorist attacks (thereby reinforcing the *casus belli* insofar as this is possible, while enhancing the government's popularity/legitimacy rather than undermining it). This would have precisely the same initial effect as the alleged conspiracy, and ultimately had a much more positive effect for the conspirators. It also would be significantly more ethically palatable, would threaten far less severe punishment in the event of discovery, and thus would be far more likely to succeed in the first place, as conspirators would be far less likely to defect.

The conspiracy alleged by the pro-ChRI theory, of course, does not in the least resemble such a plot, or any plot actually designed to benefit the GoR leadership. The conspiracy theorists imply that the attacks somehow advanced the sinister interests of the Kremlin, but a cursory critical examination of the supposed 'plot' reveals, instead, that it is almost the polar opposite of what an actual GoR conspiracy would have been.

In sum, the conspiracy theory entirely fails to establish a sensible motive for its supposed perpetrator, and in the absence of direct evidence can be dismissed on that basis alone.

# Had the GoR carried out the alleged conspiracy, the conspiracy would have probably unravelled; that it did not indicates that it probably was not undertaken

Additional evidence against the conspiracy theory derives from the very fact that the purported conspiracy never fell apart. As explained in the prior section, the hypothetical plot had a chance of failure that was at least 77%, and probably closer to 100%. That it never unraveled — no one ever defected, nor was anyone ever caught with a workingbomb (see below) or in connection with an actual explosion — is a fact best explained by the plot having **never actually existed**.

# The alleged conspiracy was never undertaken, as the overwhelming bulk of the evidence indicates that there was not a real bomb at Ryazan

In addition to the evidence that the alleged conspiracy would never have been undertaken and that it was not, there is also other evidence that it was not. Specifically, the conspiracy theory alleges that the GoR attempted to blow up an apartment building in Ryazan, and is essentially based entirely upon the discovery of a supposed bomb there — but there was no real bomb.

## It is uncertain whether the detonator of the purported bomb was functional, and unlikely that it could have caused hexogen (if any were present) to explode

To begin with, there is some debate about whether the device's detonator was functional, i.e. whether it would actually produce an initiating explosion, and if it did, whether that explosion would have been capable of causing the hexogen fuel to explode in turn. Overall, the available information gives no reason to believe either that the detonator was or was not functional, but suggests that it probably was not capable of blowing up hexogen.

The conspiracy theorists certainly claim that the detonator was functional. Litvinenko & Fel'shtinskiy assert that "the bomb's detonator was not an imitation" (L&F p156), one of the British experts consulted by them asserts that "the photograph depicts an IED" (L&F p243), the *Novaya Gazeta* reporter Voloshin asserts that, "according to the specialists who disarmed the bomb, the detonator attached to the sacks [of sugar] was not a dummy and was professionally-made", [[14]](#footnote-14) and Fel'shtinskiy told *Radio Svoboda* in June 2002 that:

we have expert analysis and photographs of the detonator that confirm that it was a live detonator. We also, by the way, have the expert analysis of independent experts from several countries, which also confirms that the detonator was live. (L&F p278)

But they are not in a position to make these claims. The detonator's functionality could really only have been confirmed by seeing if it blew up when it was meant to and, failing that, attempting to trigger its explosion. At the very least, one would have to thoroughly inspect every component of the detonator — certainly not just look at a photograph of it, as L&F and their consultants did. Nor is it clear how even the unnamed specialists cited by Voloshin could have known that the detonator was not a "dummy". The fact that it looked as though it had been assembled professionally has nothing to do with the question of whether or not it was actually functional. It could just as easily be a professionally-constructed dummy.

Indeed, if the shotgun shell incorporated into the detonator was unmodified, then the detonation of its double-base powder would not detonate hexogen, which is relatively insensitive. Thus — as stated by all three of the British explosives experts consulted by Litvinenko & Fel'shtinskiy [[15]](#footnote-15) — the only way that the purported detonator could have actually fulfilled its purported function is if the shotgun shell had been tampered with and its contents replaced with a more powerful explosive. To my knowledge, there is absolutely no reason to believe that this happened. (Moreover, if the shell was modified, it would presumably be equally possible that its contents were replaced with nothing at all, in which case the detonator would have been not only incapable of igniting the hexogen, but nonfunctional altogether.)

Indeed, there is some reason to believe that the shell was **not** modified. As noted above, *Novaya Gazeta* reporter Voloshin quoted "the specialists who disarmed the bomb" as testifying that they could somehow tell that the device was not a dummy. But Voloshin not only declined to explain **how** they could possibly tell, but also deprived these specialists of identification and of exact quotations. In contrast, in December 2001, Tkachenko (the Ministry of Internal Affairs explosives expert who ran the one test on the substance that had returned an at-least-somewhat-positive result for hexogen) told reporters that the detonator had been nothing other than a “hunting cartridge”, incapable of detonating any known type of explosive. [[16]](#footnote-16) On the one hand, he gave this statement two years after the fact, by which point conspiracy theorists suggest that he was under pressure to quash the conspiracy theory. On the other hand, as addressed shortly, the entirety of the conspiracy theory rests **entirely** upon the accuracy and reliability of Tkachenko (over and above all other authorities), so it is quite questionable whether it can dismiss just this one statement of his.

Thus, claims that the detonator was established as functional (let alone as sufficient to explode hexogen) are false and in some cases deceitful. If anything, the evidence indicates the contrary.

## It is almost certain that the purported bomb contained negligible, dummy, or no hexogen, and thus lacked any fuel with which to generate a substantial explosion

Regardless, the evidence regarding the hexogen is far clearer, and it proves, almost beyond doubt, that there was negligible, dummy, or no hexogen in the purported bomb — and thus that the purported bomb was definitely incapable of actually exploding, regardless of the purported detonator's functionality and ability to trigger hexogen (or lack thereof).

One argument, deployed by the conspiracy theorists, is that, since the substance was yellow, it must have been hexogen:

The bags’ contents did not outwardly resemble sugar. The witnesses would later unanimously assert that the bags contained a substance of yellow coloration, in granules that resembled fine pasta [vermicelli]. Which is precisely what hexogen looks like. (L&F p62)

But this conclusion is precisely backwards. Hexogen is not yellow, but white. [[17]](#footnote-17)

(Тhe only reference that I can find to hexogen having a yellowish color is on its English-language Wikipedia article, where it is described as "colorless or yellowish crystals". [[18]](#footnote-18) However, no reference is provided, and the substance is described elsewhere in the article as a "white solid". Most likely, the 'yellow' error results from the article's picture, which depicts a hexogen crystal that indeed appears yellow-brown — but clearly because the picture was either taken under a yellow light or subjected to some sort of yellow filter, since the surface upon which the crystal sits is the same yellow-brown as the crystal itself. All other Wikipedias with more than 100 million edits as of August 2021 — German, French, Spanish, Italian, and Russian — lack English Wikipedia's misleading yellow-tinted picture, and accordingly describe hexogen as either white or colorless.)

Sugar, on the other hand, **can** be yellowish (or brown, of course) if not fully refined [[19]](#footnote-19) — as the FSB’s representative to an *NTV* program tried to explain to his incredulous and hostile interlocutors, who were apparently familiar only with fully-refined sugar. [[20]](#footnote-20)

Because sugar can be either white or yellowish, but hexogen is only white, the substance's color cannot do anything in the conspiracy theorists' favor — but it can rule out hexogen, if the color is yellow, as asserted by the conspiracy theorists.

Some conspiracy theorists, perhaps noticing this problem in their argument, have tried to rectify it by claiming that the sacks contained not only hexogen, but also yellowish TNT. [[21]](#footnote-21) But there quite simply was no TNT. Hexogen at least has one test upon which to base itself (see below), while no test ever indicated TNT or any other explosive. Nor does witness testimony support the presence of TNT. *Radio Svoboda* claims that Kartofel’nikov (who discovered the sacks), on *NTV*, described the substance as:

a mixture of some sort of granules with yellowish "vermicelli". That is, "sugar with vermicelli". [[22]](#footnote-22)

Per *Radio Svoboda*, the white granules ('sugar') would then be hexogen; the yellowish ‘vermicelli’ would be TNT. But Kartofel’nikov's actual description was:

… Of a yellowish color, first of all. And such very fine — like, say, vermicelli, so [unintelligible] — granules, I would call them. … …there were granules of a yellowish color. [[23]](#footnote-23)

I.e. there was a single substance, whose color was yellowish and whose form was granular and vermicelli-like. *Radio Svoboda*'s "sugar with vermicelli", presented as a verbatim quotation, is a fabrication, and Kartofel'nikov's statement contradicts a hexogen-TNT mix.

However, fortunately for the conspiracy theorists, it is actually far from certain that the substance was yellowish. For one thing, even if it were white, it could have appeared yellowish when viewed under warm lighting (e.g. of the basement or the street outside). Moreover, it is not actually true that witnesses "unanimously" (L&F p62) described the substance as yellowish. For instance, a RUVD statement — which L&F themselves quoted — describes is as a "white crystalline substance" (L&F p65-66).

In sum, the core conspiracy theory — laid out by L&F — makes two errors (amongst many others) that actually cancel one another out so as to avoid entirely disproving the theory. The authors argue that a yellow substance could be hexogen but could not be sugar, when in reality it could be sugar but could not be hexogen. But their argument that the substance was yellow is **also** incorrect, or at least entirely uncertain. Overall, then, the whole question of color does nothing to prove things one way or another. The only thing that it **does** do is constitute yet another instance of the conspiracy theorists' incompetence and/or disingenuousness.

As for the conspiracy theorists' main argument for the presence of hexogen, it relies upon a test indicating the explosive's presence. And at this point the reader may be somewhat confused. Is not the positive test for hexogen at Ryazan, regardless of whatever the FSB might have later claimed, the one thing clearly supporting the conspiracy theory? Well, it is, but it is only able to fulfill this role because the conspiracy theorists grossly deceive their audience by playing down **two attempts made to detonate the 'bomb', both of which failed**, and by entirely concealing **three analyses of the substance, that, unlike Tkachenko's, all returned negative results.**

Crucially, the Ryazan branch of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (RUVD) and the Ryazan branch of the FSB (RFSB) are, according to the conspiracy theory itself, entirely unaware of the purported conspiracy theory — and, in fact, so determined to catch the terrorists, and so defiant of the FSB headquarters in Moscow (MFSB), that Patrushev is forced to rescue his 'terrorists' at the last minute by coming up with the 'exercises' story. And I have been able to identify a total of six distinct tests performed by the Ryazan authorities on 22 and 23 September: two failed detonations, one at-least-somewhat-positive-result analysis, and three negative-result analyses.

Probably before any of these, a test of sorts was 'conducted' by a sniffer-dog. Specifically, it was reported that, when some of the substance in the bags was extracted, "the detection dog reacted to it as if it were an explosive".[[24]](#footnote-24) But, while certainly something that should have prompted alarm (and did so), this is definitely less dispositive than the six actual tests that were subsequently conducted.

The first two — never mentioned by the conspiracy theorists — were chemical analyses taken by an unnamed "explosives specialist" (probably of the RUVD, though that is not clear) who "twice conducted an express-analysis of the [potentially] explosive object" — "and in both cases the analysis showed the absence of any explosive particles".[[25]](#footnote-25)

Next came the chemical analysis by Tkachenko, the head of the engineering-technical division of the RUVD. This was the one (and only) test that returned an at-least-somewhat-positive result. (Specifically, it tested positive for hexogen, and not for any other explosive.) The RFSB stated that "the initial express-analysis indeed indicated some presence of hexogen vapors in the sugar",[[26]](#footnote-26) and a later *Kommersant* report described how:

the head of the Ryazan Police engineering-technical division, who arrived after [the first two analyses], conducted the same test and uncovered the presence of particles of the explosive substance hexogen. [[27]](#footnote-27)

Unsurprisingly, despite the two negative tests, this single at-least-somewhat-positive test greatly concerned the Ryazan authorities, who proceeded to treat what they had found as if it might be a bomb, and to carry out further tests in order to determine if it actually was. All three such tests, however, indicated that it was not.

The first test was an effort, seemingly undertaken by the RUVD on-site and more or less immediately (possibly even before some or all of the above analyses; the precise timing is not clear), to carry out a controlled detonation (presumably within a bomb containment chamber) of a sample of the substance. However, the substance did not explode:

Having disconnected the timer, the police officers carefully took the sacks onto the street and opened them, finding within a mixture of sugar and a greyish crystalline powder. An attempt to explode it revealed that the thing would not detonate... [[28]](#footnote-28)

Or, as Litvinenko & Fel'shtinskiy themselves put it:

The explosives experts of the [RUVD's] engineering-technical department, under the leadership of Senior Lieutenant Yuriy Tkachenko, disarmed the bomb in eleven minutes and, at about 11pm, attempted an onsite test detonation of the mixture. It did not trigger a detonation… (L&F p62)

This was soon followed by another attempt by the RUVD to detonate the substance — this time, at their proving grounds, using a full kilogram of the substance. This attempt was also unsuccessful, and "an explosion did not occur". [[29]](#footnote-29) As one reporter put it, "even the police officers could not detonate the bomb in Ryazan… …the infernal machine stubbornly refused to explode". [[30]](#footnote-30) However, this does not actually count for much, because in this case, the RUVD tried to blow up the substance using an ersatz detonator analogous to the one that they had found — i.e. using a shotgun shell. But as established above, the only way that the detonator could possibly have worked is if the shotgun shell's powder had been replaced with something much more powerful. A regular shotgun shell, like that used by the RUVD, would not have caused the substance to detonate even if it were hexogen. Consequently, as with the dog's sniff-test, I do not include this one amongst the six dispositive tests of the substance.

(The two other attempts at detonation, described above and below, should have been sufficient to blow up hexogen, if that was indeed the substance. While a standard cartridge or shotgun shell would not be enough to detonate hexogen or much of anything else, hexogen **would** be detonated by any testing or bomb-disposal procedure capable of dealing with commonly-found explosives: e.g. C4, which is principally hexogen, or TNT, which is three times more impact-resistant than hexogen. [[31]](#footnote-31))

Another, more dispositive attempt at detonation was conducted by the RFSB, apparently some time in the night of 22-23 September.

According to the investigation, employees of the Ryazan Oblast branch of the FSB, after conducting an analysis, went out to their proving grounds for an experimental detonation of the substance contained within the discovered sacks. "From each sack they took about three kilograms of the substance. Returning after 45-55 minutes, they reported that the substance had not exploded." [[32]](#footnote-32)

Now, L&F attempt to do away with this inconvenient fact by implying that it is untrustworthy, writing that:

Meanwhile, the FSB's press service issued a statement that the Ryazan sacks had been taken to a proving grounds, and their detonation attempted, in order to test their contents. An explosion was not produced, since the sacks contained typical sugar, the FSB triumphantly reported. (L&F p83)

By referring only to the "FSB", the authors give the impression that this test was carried out by the Moscow FSB, supposedly the executors of the conspiracy. But in reality, as indicated above, the test was carried out by the **Ryazan** FSB (RFSB) — the very people whom the conspiracy claims (and needs) to be honest, uninvolved in the conspiracy, and determined to catch the 'terrorists'.

Finally, one more test was conducted, again by the RFSB, probably on 23 September. An ITAR-TASS report filed at 11:40am (local time) 24 September quoted the RFSB spokesman as saying that "an initial express-analysis indeed confirmed some presence of hexogen vapors in the sugar" (referring, presumably, to the one analysis by Tkachenko that returned an at-least-somewhat-positive result), but "the analysis conducted in the FSB's laboratory refuted this". [[33]](#footnote-33) And, to be clear, this completed analysis was conducted in a **Ryazan** FSB laboratory: as for anything done in Moscow, the report went on to say that:

FSB specialists from Moscow took samples of the sacks' contents back to Moscow for a full analysis. According to Bludov, "this work might take at least a week, even though all the residents of Ryazan await its results".

There were, after this, actually two more tests conducted much later. The MFSB and the Moscow headquarters of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MMVD) — specifically, its Forensic Science Center (Экспертно-криминалистический центр) [[34]](#footnote-34) — both conducted analyses of the substance in their Moscow laboratories (L&F p82-83). Their results were, like all the others (save Tkachenko's), negative. Or rather, not entirely negative: the MFSB laboratory, at least, announced that "the discovered substance is harmless sugar with hexogen added 'for scent'".[[35]](#footnote-35) The MMVD, independent from the FSB and a rival of it in counterterrorism, is presumably reliable. (Unless the conspiracy is now supposed to extend beyond the Kremlin and FSB to inexplicably include the MVD, as well.) However, since the MFSB may have been the only body that collected the test samples from Ryazan, [[36]](#footnote-36) the samples conceivably could have been tampered with, or even entirely replaced, by a conspirator, before being delivered to the MFSB and MMVD laboratories. Therefore, I do not consider these two tests to be dispositive.

Thus — excluding the canine sniff-test (positive), the RUVD's shotgun shell detonation attempt (negative), and the Moscow tests (both negative) — we are left with one dispositive test indicating the presence of **some** amount of hexogen (Tkachenko's chemical analysis on the night of 22 September) versus five dispositive tests indicating that there was no hexogen or so little hexogen that it was undetected and harmless: two RUVD chemical analyses prior to Tkachenko's; an on-site 22 September attempt by the RUVD to detonate a sample of the substance; an attempt by the RFSB at detonation later that night; and an RFSB chemical analysis conducted on 23 September.

Moreover, the one test with an at-least-somewhat-positive result, and the two chemical analyses that preceded it, are arguably the least weighty of the six dispositive tests. They are called 'express-analyses' for a reason, and are less reliable than the full test that was conducted at the RFSB laboratory: hence the above-cited statement made by the RFSB on or 24 September: "the initial express-analysis indeed indicated some presence of hexogen vapors in the sugar", but "the analysis performed in the laboratory of the [R]FSB contradicted this". (Note that this report was published/filed at 11:40am (local time) 24 September, and thus before Patrushev made his statement about the exercises at 4pm. Indeed, it was made as the RUVD and RFSB were, according to the conspiracy theory, closing in on Patrushev's officers, and could not be kept at bay by any means other than his gambit of declaring the whole thing an exercise. So, according to the conspiracy theory itself, this statement by the RFSB must be entirely trustworthy.)

The express-analyses are also probably less weighty evidence than the two (non-shotgun-shell-based) detonation attempts are. After all, what ultimately matters is if the purported bomb can actually explode. If its supposed fuel cannot be cajoled into detonation, then it either (1) is not a bomb, or (2) is a badly-made dud. And the latter can be more or less ruled out. For one thing, we are not talking about wires being soldered improperly, or the timer being set wrong, or some similarly easy-to-make mistake. Rather, we are talking about the bomb-makers including so little fuel in their bomb that it was not only incapable of exploding a 13-story apartment block (as ostensibly intended), but incapable of exploding **at all**. Whereas all of the **actual** apartment bombings, tragically, were more than powerful enough.

Thus, the overwhelming bulk of the evidence indicates that the Ryazan 'sugar' was not explosive. Even the one exception does not contradict this, but merely indicates the presence of **some** amount of hexogen — not necessarily a dangerous amount. The MFSB itself subsequently confirmed that trace, harmless amounts of hexogen were present.

## The Ryazan authorities' own conclusions

A conclusion that there was no bomb does not only follow from reviewing the available evidence long after the fact — it was also forming within the Ryazan authorities as more information became available to them.

Naturally, even a single (at least somewhat) positive test result caused the Ryazan authorities to treat the situation seriously. L&F and Voloshin wonder:

…why was the ['sugar'] sent to be tested in Moscow? And…why did the laboratory accept it? … And why was a secondary test then performed? Is it really so hard to identify sugar on the first try? … Really, why did the FSB [actually the RFSB] send the sacks to the proving-ground, if it knew that exercises were being conducted in Ryazan and that the sacks contained sugar… (L&F p82-83)

And:

Why…was the cargo urgently sent to Moscow…? … Why, if it was already clear that it was deposits of sugar that had been found in Ryazan? Were they trying to make it in time for the morning tea party? Or were they actually not so sure? [[37]](#footnote-37)

But the conspiracy theorists seemingly forget that their own argument claims and requires that the Ryazan authorities were not party or privy to the exercise, and it is thus no wonder that they treated it seriously. There is also no reason to believe that the Moscow laboratories were any more privy to the exercises, and it is no wonder that they preferred (given the one positive-result test, and given the general disruption that the whole affair had caused in Ryazan) to ensure that the substance really was harmless. And it is an absolute mystery how the conspiracy theorists consider it **suspicious** that the MFSB sent the substance not only to its own laboratory, but also to an MMVD laboratory for a "secondary test". Presumably, if the conspiracy theorists were right, the MFSB would want to send the substance to as few laboratories as possible — and certainly not to ones outside of its control. Indeed, if things had gone the other way, and fewer or no tests were conducted, one suspects that the conspiracy theorists would have argued that the substance **should** have gone to as many laboratories as possible, and that the MFSB's insistence that it is just sugar, unworthy of analysis, is a cover-up and a sign of guilt.

In any case, the RUVD was skeptical about the 'bomb' from the outset. At 10:05am 23 September, *ITAR-TASS* reported that

According to Aleksey Savin [the acting head of the RUVD], specialists are conducting a series of analyses to determine the content and explosiveness of the mixture found in the sacks. So far, our specialists have not firmly concluded that hexogen is present in the mixture. [[38]](#footnote-38)

(Which, of course, was true: by this time, three analyses had been performed, of which only one had returned an at-all-positive result.)

And by noon, the RUVD was outright stating that the device was not a real bomb. At 12:35pm 23 September, *Interfax* reported that:

Officers are also somewhat skeptical of the theory that there is hexogen in the mixture found in the sacks. According to RUVD officers, "while vapours of the substance [i.e. hexogen] were uncovered, an attempted detonation did not trigger any explosion". Thus, the officers think that hexogen was either absent from the mixture, or present only in very insignificant quantity. [[39]](#footnote-39)

That is, the RUVD came to precisely the same conclusions as I have: there was either no hexogen at all, or so little that it was inconsistently detected and totally incapable of exploding.

## Potential causes of the one at-least-somewhat-positive result

But, even if there were five negative test results, how do we account for the single at-least-somewhat-positive one? There are at least two entirely plausible explanations.

Most simply, the one positive result may have been an error, probably due to the contamination of the analysis device, or of Tkachenko, with trace amounts of hexogen from some other source. The conspiracy theorists insist that this is more or less impossible, because Tkachenko is an expert and his equipment was technologically-advanced and expertly-maintained. But the conspiracy theory requires that all five other dispositive tests were conducted incompetently or dishonestly — and three of those were carried out by Tkachenko's own bomb squad.

Probably more likely, trace amounts of hexogen might have been deliberately included in order to increase the realism of the exercise. This could even have been dummy hexogen: simulants of hexogen and other explosives are manufactured and sold for training purposes, and these simulants not only mimic the real thing in appearance, but will also set off gas analyzers and some other detectors. [[40]](#footnote-40) Negligible or fake hexogen would conform with the one at-least-somewhat-positive analysis result (which, specifically, found "vapors" [[41]](#footnote-41) and "particles" [[42]](#footnote-42)), with the three negative analysis results, and with the two failed attempts to detonate the substance. It would also align with the official 'exercises' explanation, and with the MFSB laboratory's later report of "harmless sugar with hexogen added 'for scent'".[[43]](#footnote-43)

Both explanations are entirely plausible — unlike the notion that five dispositive tests (three conducted by the supposedly ultra-competent Tkachenko and/or his team) failed to detect/detonate hexogen that was present in a quantity sufficient to bring down a 13-story building.

## Summary

In sum, the conspiracy theorists mainly try to convince their audiences that the Ryazan device was an actual bomb by stating that it had an operational detonator (when it is actually unclear whether the detonator was explosive, and if anything outright doubtful that it was capable of triggering hexogen, if there were any), and by emphasizing the one dispositive test that found **some** trace of hexogen (while concealing the other five dispositive tests, which found none). In reality, the Ryazan authorities — whom the conspiracy theory needs in the role of dogged opponents of the MFSB — were themselves skeptical of the 'bomb' from the outset. It is very unlikely that all five negative test results were in error, and far more likely that either the one at-least-somewhat-positive result was an error, or that there was indeed a negligible and harmless amount of hexogen (or dummy hexogen) present, which was detected once by the RUVD (and later by the MFSB), but which was missed (or correctly excluded) by the other Ryazan tests and was not capable of detonation.

# Conclusion

Overall, then, the GoR was strongly incentivized to **not** carry out the conspiracy of which it is accused. The hypothetical plot's extremely low probability of success indicates that it probably was in fact never undertaken. And the conspiracy theorists' main argument is based upon an extreme distortion of facts that actually rule out the conspiracy theory.

Future work will tie up the major loose ends left by this article, proving that the Ryazan incident almost certainly was actually just an FSB training exercise, proving that Patrushev's statement to that effect does not make sense as a cover-up (per the conspiracy theory), and adding some new evidence to the voluminous amount already attesting to the ChRI's responsibility for all of the actual bombings of 1999.

The discrediting of the conspiracy theory constitutes a major obstacle and/or corrective to the narrative that is deployed in Russia against the state, and in the US and its allies against Russia. Especially to the increasingly popular version of that narrative that defines Russia as a 'kleptocracy,' and that refuses to approach the country on the basis of normal theories of politics or international relations, instead favoring a moralistic, personalistic, criminological, and conspiriological framing.

# Appendix: *Radio Svoboda*'s promotion of the conspiracy theory

Articles devoted to the conspiracy theory:

Андрей Пионтковский, "Трусость и злодейство", 1 Sep 2014, svoboda.org/a/26557899.html

Владимир Воронов, "Кто взрывает Россию?", 25 Sep 2014, svoboda.org/a/26605153.html

Владимир Кара-Мурза, Владимир Воронов, Дэвид Саттер & Михаил Трепашкин, "Кто взрывал дома 15 лет назад?", 25 Sep 2014, svoboda.org/a/26605562.html

Владимир Голышев, "Чижик на коне", 5 Apr 2017, svoboda.org/a/28411415.html

Владимир Кара-Мурза-старший, Валентин Гефтер, Сергей Ковалев & Лев Левинсон, "Кто взрывал дома в России в 1999-м?", 5 Sep 2017, svoboda.org/a/28718520.html

Дмитрий Волчек, "Гексогеновые годы. Владимир Путин во главе ФСБ", 25 Jul 2018, svoboda.org/a/29387767.html

Юрий Федоров, "Вопросы, которым 20 лет", 9 Sep 2019, svoboda.org/a/30154616.html

Юрий Жигалкин, "От взрывов в Москве до вторжения в Украину. Мог ли Запад остановить Путина?", 10 Sep 2022, svoboda.org/a/32026970.html

Михаил Кригер, "Первое преступление Путина. Михаил Кригер – о 'рязанском сахаре'", 20 Sep 2023, svoboda.org/a/ 32595768.html

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Дмитрий Волчек, "Невротики в Кремле (интервью с Михаилом Зыгарем)", 24 Oct 2015, svoboda.org/a/27322500.html

Михаил Соколов, Владимир Рыжков, Вячеслав Мальцев & Евгений Федоров, "Зачем Кремлю гнать вас на митинги?", 5 Apr 2017, svoboda.org/a/28412196.html

Андрей Бажутин et al., "Чего хотят дальнобойщики?", 6 Apr 2017, svoboda.org/a/28414842.html

Зигмунд Дзеньчоловски, Юлий Рыбаков, Владимир Семаго & Игорь Чубайс, "Канадский 'Список Магнитского'", 18 May 2017, svoboda.org/a/28496186.html

Владимир Кара-Мурза-старший, Сергей Григорьянц & Александр Гольдфарб, "Ультиматум Терезы Мэй", 12 Mar 2018, svoboda.org/a/29094819.html

Дмитрий Волчек, "'Дело Собчака': загадки биографии покровителя Путина (интервью с Артемом Кругловым)", 9 Jun 2018, svoboda.org/a/29278219.html

Аля Пономарёва, "'В Крым пришел Колумбайн'. Реакции на трагедию в Керчи", 17 Oct 2018, svoboda.org/a/29548968.html

Михаил Соколов, Лев Шлосберг & Константин Боровой, "Россия без мира", 18 Oct 2018, svoboda.org/a/29550838.html

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Михаил Соколов, "Где Путин споткнется? (интервью с Гарри Каспаровым)", 29 Oct 2020, svoboda.org/a/30919265.html

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Леонид Велехов, "Не надо идти на компромиссы с самим собой", 20 Mar 2021, svoboda.org/a/29874863.html

Михаил Соколов, Валерий Соловей & Денис Волков, "Страна Путина, режим Патрушева", 12 Jul 2021, svoboda.org/a/31354051.html

Вадим Штепа, "Не захотели как в Париже. Вадим Штепа – о 25-летии договора в Хасавюрте", 31 Aug 2021, svoboda.org/a/31435180.html

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Дария Али-Заде & Наталья Голицына, "Все знают, что вы преступники", 23 Nov 2021, svoboda.org/a/31573817.html

Дмитрий Волчек, "Три 'семьи' в Кремле. Тайные пружины власти при Ельцине и Путине", 27 Nov 2021, svoboda.org/a/31578344.html

Юрий Жигалкин, "'Путин возьмёт всё, что плохо лежит'. Советские инстинкты Кремля", 5 Feb 2022, svoboda.org/a/31680772.html

Юрий Жигалкин, "Лекарство от бешенства. Остановят ли Путина новые санкции?", 26 Feb 2022, svoboda.org/a/31724484.html

Александр Нежный, "Изуродованная Россия. Александр Нежный - об унижении страны", 12 Mar 2022, svoboda.org/a/31739834.html

Владимир Абаринов, "'Он способен на всё'. Американский журналист Дэвид Саттер при генсеке и трех президентах", 3 Apr 2022, svoboda.org/a/31756398.html

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# Appendix: The historical record of false-flag attacks

Definition of a **state-executed incriminatory false-flag attack**: (1) State authorities carry out violence, or create the appearance thereof, (2) such that it appears to have been perpetrated by a certain other actor, (3) for the primary or sole purpose of implicating that actor.

Cases not fitting this pattern are not considered, e.g.:

* Falsely claiming an attack without actually doing anything.
* Disguising oneself as the enemy, or as a neutral third party, to gain a military advantage.
* Mistakenly, but genuinely, believing that one is under attack. E.g. the second Tonkin Gulf incident, which may have been later trumped up by the USG, but which seems to have been genuinely perceived as an attack by the US boat in question.[[44]](#footnote-44)
* Fabricating an attack so that one can claim credit for it. E.g. German intelligence agents staged the rescue attempt of a prisoner in order to boost their own credibility and facilitate their infiltration of left-wing terrorist groups.[[45]](#footnote-45)
* Fabricating enemies so that one can claim to have defeated them. E.g. Columbian troops, who murdered civilians and then dressed them up as guerillas, were not falsely ascribing an attack to some other actor, certainly not with for the purpose of discrediting it. [[46]](#footnote-46) Rather, they wanted credit for defeating guerillas. Similarly, the North Macedonian government murdered seven Pakistani illegal immigrants, and claimed that they were Islamist terrorists, not to implicate the supposed threat (after all, Islamist terrorism was seen as plenty of a threat already), but rather to "get the attention of the international community" and present itself as a partner in the international 'war on terror'.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Unsubstantiated cases are also not considered. E.g. terrorist attacks attributed by some to Operation Gladio, or claims that the Algerian Army massacred its own people and blamed it on the Islamist rebels.

Here follows a (surely incomplete) record of state-executed incriminatory false-flag attacks:

**Mukden Incident, 1931** [[48]](#footnote-48)

* Description: Elements of Japan's Kwantung Army blow up part of a Japanese-controlled railroad in Manchuria.
* Purpose: Justify the occupation of all Manchuria.
* Casualties: None; the train is actually able to pass over the damaged track without derailing. However, there probably **could** have been casualties, and perhaps were supposed to be. How many, and from which countries, is not clear, but they likely would have included ethnc Japanese or at least Japanese subjects.
* Result: Successful within Japan; the Kwantung Army occupies Manchuria.
* Note: The plot was executed by a relatively small number of soldiers (the highest-ranking one a colonel), acting without orders from the government. In fact, when the government caught wind of the plot, the Minister of War explicitly forbade that the plan be carried out. However, the major general who was ordered to stop it instead deliberately allowed it to go ahead.

**Operation Himmler, 1939** [[49]](#footnote-49)

* Description: Various incidents — at least fourteen are claimed, though many may have never even been staged — including attacks upon a German customs post at Hochlinden, and upon a radio station at Gleiwitz, by SS troops disguised as Poles.
* Purpose: Justify war with Poland.
* Casualties: Only the concentration camp prisoners who are killed by the Germans, dressed in Polish uniforms, and left behind as evidence.
* Result: Successful within Germany, where Hitler uses the attacks to declare war.

**Maynila Incident, 1939** [[50]](#footnote-50)

* Description: Red Army shells its own territory, claims that the Finnish military is responsible and that it has suffered casualties.
* Purpose: Justify war with Finland.
* Casualties: Claim of 4 killed and 9 wounded soldiers, but no one actually appears to have been hurt.
* Result: Successful within the USSR, which indeed goes to war.

**Operation Ajax, 1953** [[51]](#footnote-51)

* Description: CIA agents, passing themselves off as communists supporting Mossadegh, threaten clerics, and bomb the house of at least one.
* Purpose: Turn public opinion against Mossadegh.
* Casualties: Unclear if there were any. If there were, they would have been Iranian.
* Result: Presumably successful, as Mossadegh is removed.

**Lavon Affair, 1954** [[52]](#footnote-52)

* Description: Egyptian Jews, recruited by Israeli intelligence, carry out bombings of Egyptian, American, and British properties, and try to implicate opponents of Nasser.
* Purpose: Make Egypt appear unstable and thereby sabotage Nasser's outreach to the US and UK.
* Casualties: None.
* Result: Unsuccessful, because the perpetrators are caught.

**Bombing of the Turkish Consulate in Thessalonika, 1955** [[53]](#footnote-53)

* Description: Turkey bombs its own consulate in Thessalonika.
* Purpose: Incite/justify a pogrom in Istanbul.
* Casualties: Apparently none.
* Result: Successful; pogrom is carried out.

**Turkish false-flag attacks in Cyprus, 1974**[[54]](#footnote-54)

* Description: Elements of the Turkish military carry out provocations against Turkish Cypriot targets.
* Purpose: Presumably to intensify the conflict and/or justify Turkish intervention.
* Casualties: None indicated.
* Result: Presumably successful, as the Turkish intervention is carried out.
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