



THE SUNDAYTIMES

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MAGAZINE



DAVID WALSH AT THE MASTERS

SPORT

Russia accused of complicity in Syria war crime

Boris Johnson told to call off Moscow mission

Tim Shipman Political Editor
Toby Harnden Washington

Britain and America will this week directly accuse Russia of complicity in war crimes in Syria and demand that Vladimir Putin pull the rug from Bashar al-Assad's blood-soaked regime.

Rex Tillerson – President Donald Trump's secretary of state – will fly to Moscow to confront Russia with evidence that it had knowledge of, and sought to cover up, the regime's deadly sarin strike last week that left 87 people dead.

Turning the screws on the Kremlin, Sir Michael Fallon, the defence secretary, accused Russia of being "by proxy responsible for every civilian death last week" because "this latest war crime happened on their watch". Writing in The Sunday Times, Fallon called for regime change in Syria, saying a solution to the crisis would depend on "the departure of Assad". "Someone who uses barrel bombs and chemicals to his own people cannot be the future leader of Syria," he writes. "Assad must go."

Last night Britain and America were working up a joint plan to demand that Putin withdraw military support from the dictator in Damascus and begin a transition to a new regime. Tillerson will also accuse Russia of being in breach of its obligations under a 2013 agreement to oversee the destruction of Syria's chemical arsenal, saying that Moscow has "clearly failed in its responsibility" to eliminate those weapons.

Boris Johnson, the foreign secretary, yesterday abandoned a visit



TRUMP GOES TO WAR

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to Moscow, where he had been due to meet the foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, after talks with Tillerson and Theresa May on Friday night. Johnson said he stood aside so Tillerson could deliver a "clear and co-ordinated message to the Russians", adding: "We deplore Russia's continued defence of the Assad regime."

The decision sparked claims that the US did not want Johnson – with his notoriously florid language – heading into an already volatile situation. Tim Farron, the Liberal Democrat leader, branded the foreign secretary "a poodle of Washington" who was "having his diary managed from across the pond". He added: "It is pretty shameful when even Trump judges you to be a buffoon."

Johnson spent the weekend

drumming up a coalition of the willing to back a joint resolution of G7 foreign ministers, meeting in Italy on Tuesday, calling for a transition away from Assad, Russian demilitarisation in Syria and a plan to rebuild the country.

Putin will be threatened with isolation if he continues to prop up the regime, but offered a route back to international acceptability if he co-operates. An aide to Johnson said: "Tillerson didn't tell us not to go. Boris will lead efforts to bring together a coalition of support against ongoing Russian activity and the Syrian regime. We need to find a way in which Russia can save face, but also gradually withdraw support for Assad."

Claims of Russian complicity in Tuesday's chemical attack rest on analysis that a Russian drone flew over the town of Khan Sheikhoun shortly before one of Assad's Syrian Su-22 warplanes dropped a sarin gas bomb, killing some 80 people. They are investigating whether a Russian aircraft bombed a local hospital later to try to destroy evidence. A picture of a Soviet-era chemical weapons container was seen at the base from where the raid was launched.

Fallon added: "If Russia wants to be absolved of responsibility for future attacks, Putin needs to enforce commitments, dismantle Assad's chemical weapons arsenal for good and get fully engaged with the UN peacekeeping process. Russia must show the resolve necessary to bring this regime to heel. It has had every opportunity to stop the civil war. It's time for Russia to be part of the solution."

A WINNING DAY FOR THE LADIES AT AINTREE



Racegoers cheer on the runners yesterday at Aintree. The 170th Grand National was won by One For Arthur, ridden by Derek Fox and trained by Lucinda Russell. The eight-year-old is owned by Belinda McClung and Deborah Thomson Full story, page 3

Westminster killer's link to Luton mosque

Andrew Gilligan and Robin Henry

The Westminster terrorist had a key role at a mosque that urges Muslims to take up weapons to gain "victory over the Jews and the rest of the enemies of Islam".

Khalid Masood was a public contact person for calloislam.com, the main website of the hardline Luton Islamic Centre mosque.

Masood's name, a phone number that The Sunday Times has confirmed as his, and the calloislam.com web address appear on stickers attached to leaflets on display at the mosque.

The disclosure comes as hundreds of police officers are expected to line London's streets tomorrow for the funeral of PC Keith Palmer, who was stabbed to death by Masood at the entrance to the Houses of Parliament. Three other people were killed when Masood drove a car into them on Westminster Bridge during the attack on March 22. A fifth victim – Andreea Cristea, a Romanian tourist – died on Friday.

Sermons published on calloislam.com, and branded with its logo, call on worshippers to "make ready... steeds of war (ie weapons) to threaten the enemy of Allah... We ask Allah that he grant us the ability to pursue the proper means for gaining victory over the Jews and over the rest of the enemies of Islam."

Elas UK – an English-language school in Luton where Masood taught – was a project of the mosque. Information about Masood's role at Luton Islamic Centre could shed new light on how and when he was radicalised. Haras Rafiq – head of the Quilliam Foundation, an anti-extremism think tank – said that security officials believed Masood was radicalised while a worshipper at the mosque in Luton, where he lived for more than two years until 2013.

The mosque claimed last night that the stickers had been placed on the leaflets by The Sunday Times in order to defame it. It denied that Masood had worshipped there.

Full report, page 15

Sarin chief's sons are UK citizens

Dipesh Gadhur

The son and brother of President Bashar al-Assad's alleged chemical weapons chief have been granted UK citizenship even though he is under international sanctions.

Amr Armanazi's youngest son, Bisher, and older brother, Ghayth, were allowed British passports after he had been blacklisted in 2012 by the US government for running a facility in Syria allegedly involved in the production of sarin nerve gas and other weapons of mass destruction.

Armanazi's eldest son, Zayd, a British citizen since 2009, works with his younger sibling at an investment bank in the City.

The revelation follows last week's sarin gas attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Syria's Idlib province, which killed more than 80 people, including 33 children.

Armanazi was placed under US sanctions because he heads the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in Damascus, said by intelligence agencies to be the hub of Assad's "non-conventional" weapons programme.

The US State Department said: "The SSRC also has a public civilian research function; however, its activities focus on the development of biological weapons, chemical weapons and missiles."

"During his tenure, Armanazi oversaw a facility that was involved in the production of sarin nerve agent."

Armanazi, 72, was added to UK and EU sanctions lists in 2014.

His family in the UK, who deny he is involved in military activities, described last week's massacre as a "heinous crime".

Cops got the trots in Moscow

Richard Kerbaj Security Correspondent

The Scotland Yard detectives who hunted the killers who poisoned Alexander Litvinenko with a radioactive cup of tea have revealed that they were poisoned themselves in what they believe was a state-sanctioned attack.

Former detective inspector Brian Tarpey, who led the investigation in Russia into the killing of the former KGB agent in London in 2006, said his team was followed by agents of the FSB, successor to

the KGB, his hotel room searched and his tea – along with that of a colleague – doctored during a visit to the prosecutor general's office. "I had a cup of tea and we left," he said. "I started to feel uncomfortable; not wanting to put too fine a point on it, I had the shits."

"We were probably poisoned with something like gastroenteritis. I think there was a deliberate ploy to weaken us physically because we were the decision makers in the team."

The claims are made in a Channel 4 documentary, Hunting the

KGB Killers, which reveals the inside story of Scotland Yard's investigation for the first time.

Tarpey and his team of detectives were briefed by MI6 before their trip to Moscow and warned about potential "honey traps". Tarpey accused Russian officials of frustrating his investigation.

The Russian embassy refused to answer detailed questions relating to Tarpey's claims.

'Russia got dirty to stop us finding Litvinenko's killers', page 26

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'RUSSIA GOT DIRTY TO STOP US FINDING LITVINENKO'S KILLERS'

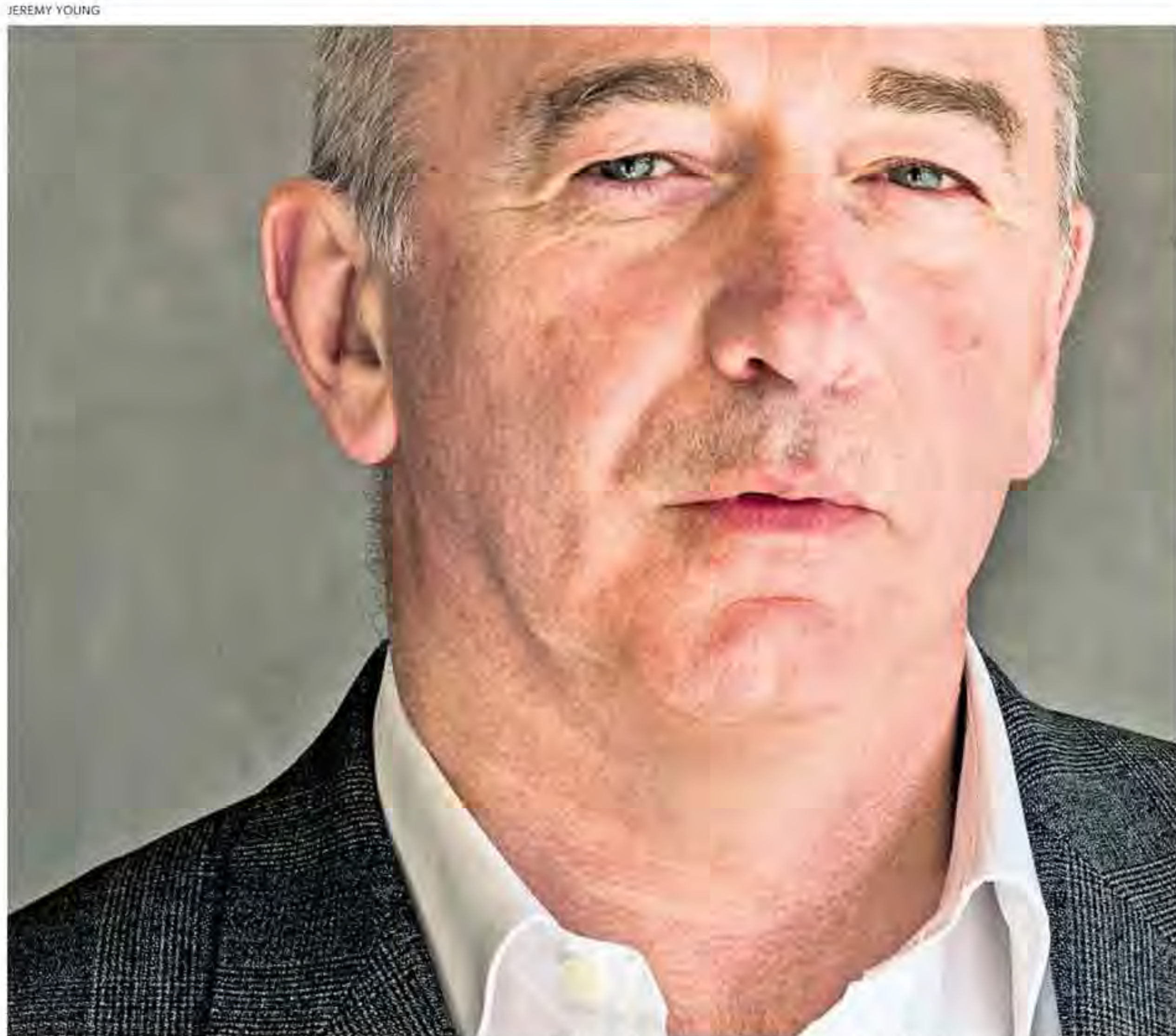
After years of silence the former Met officers who investigated the poisoning reveal how the Kremlin blocked and intimidated them

RICHARD KERBAJ



Three days after he began running the investigation into the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, Detective Superintendent Clive Timmons got a phone call that changed everything. On November 23, 2006 the officer at the Metropolitan police was informed by Britain's Atomic Weapons Establishment that a lethal dose of polonium-210, a radioactive substance, had been found in the urine of Litvinenko, a British citizen and former KGB officer. Earlier that day Litvinenko, 44, had suffered a cardiac arrest in hospital. He had been given a dose of polonium "more than a million times" the amount needed to kill a man, according to police. Until then doctors had been unable to determine the cause of his illness after he was admitted to Barnet Hospital in north London and then transferred for special

ist treatment at University College Hospital, also in the capital, two weeks later. Timmons had never heard of polonium. "We've all grown up watching James Bond," he says. "We all know plutonium, we all know uranium. So I said, 'Polonium? Don't you mean plutonium?' And so this fella, very tolerantly, says, 'No, Clive, I mean polonium-210 - the most toxic substance known to man'." Peter Clarke, a deputy assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard who oversaw the Litvinenko investigation, also says he was unaware of the poison and its devastating capabilities: "But it was absolutely clear this was something completely out of the ordinary. It changed the nature of what we were dealing with." Almost 11 years since his murder, Litvinenko's alleged killers, Andrei Lugovoy and Dmitri Kovtun, are still at large and have never faced trial. This is despite the Crown Prosecution Service recommending that they be extradited and charged. Both men, who are former KGB agents, deny the allegations. My fascination with this story led me on a two-year mission to track down Timmons and his team, none of whom had spoken to the media about the case. The retired officers were difficult to pin down, partly because several of them



Brian Tarpey says he and his team were "outmanoeuvred like a chess piece" by the Russians during a trip to Moscow

were based abroad, but chiefly because they were distrustful of reporters. After I pestered them by email, text messages and voicemails, they eventually agreed to appear in my forthcoming documentary, *Hunting the KGB Killers*. Litvinenko, who had spent 11 years as a KGB agent, had become a British citizen just weeks before his death. In Russia he had been jailed in the late 1990s after whistleblowing over alleged state corruption. He continued his campaign after seeking asylum in Britain in 2000 accompanied by his wife, Marina, and his son, Anatoly, now 22. From the apparent safety of the UK,

"I think there was a deliberate ploy to weaken us physically"

Litvinenko wrote a book accusing President Vladimir Putin of being behind the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings that killed 293 people and injured more than 1,000. He claimed the atrocities were carried out by the KGB to justify the second Chechen war that helped to sweep Putin into power. Putin denied the claims. So when Litvinenko became gravely ill on the evening of November 1, 2006 and was later admitted to hospital with severe vomiting and body aches, he suspected Moscow had sent someone to poison him. Doctors initially dismissed his suspicions when he checked in under the name "Edwin Carter", but referred his case to Scotland Yard after he revealed his real identity and details of his former career with the Russian secret service. A photo shows Litvinenko propped up in his hospital bed attached to electrocardiogram sensors, looking gaunt and bald after the sudden loss of his hair. "There is an iconic picture of Sasha, as I called him, that carries a lot of emotion for me and for the team at the time," Timmons says. "What it doesn't capture is his incredible suffering. His throat was all blistered and he couldn't swallow; he could hardly talk. He was in diabolical pain."

Litvinenko asked Marina to release the photograph. She says he told her: "I want people to see what they might do [to others]." Litvinenko died six hours after Timmons learnt that polonium had been used. Timmons ordered his detectives to track the former dissident's movements on November 1 - the

day of the attack. The trail ultimately revealed more than 40 contaminated locations. "If you're exposed to it you secrete it through sweat," says Timmons. "So when you touch something or pick something up... we can map where you've been." The investigation initially focused on a meeting between Litvinenko and Mario Scaramella, an Italian intelligence analyst, whom he met that day at a branch of the Itsu sushi chain in Piccadilly. When traces of polonium were found there, Timmons reasoned it could be the murder scene. However, Scaramella emerged as a red herring after police searched a hotel in which he had stayed and found no polonium contamination. It was not until detectives began to investigate Litvinenko's other movements that day that their inquiry began taking proper shape. He had told police that during a meeting with Lugovoy and Kovtun at the Millennium Hotel in Mayfair he had sipped tea from a cup that had been poured before he arrived. Litvin-

Andrei Lugovoy, left, is one of the two men British police believe murdered

Alexander Litvinenko, right, by poisoning him with polonium in London in 2006



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£2.3m
Cost of the public inquiry into the death of Litvinenko

viewees - particularly Lugovoy and Kovtun - were suffering from polonium contamination. Tarpey says the pair claimed Litvinenko had tried to poison them. He recalls a visit to the prosecutor general's office: "I had a cup of tea and left. I started to feel uncomfortable. Not wanting to put too fine a point on it, I had the shits. I have no doubt we were probably poisoned with something like gastroenteritis. I think there was a deliberate ploy to weaken us physically because we were the decision makers in the team." Tarpey returned to the UK to discover the evidence pack he had been provided with by Russian officials was missing the Lugovoy interview. "I'd been outmanoeuvred like a chess piece," he says. Despite the frustrated investigation in Moscow, Scotland Yard made its biggest breakthrough when it tracked down the murder weapon - the "smoking teapot", as Timmons describes it. Experts advised him there would be no point in examining "teapots, teacups, saucers, teaspoons - or anything that has been washed 42 times in the dishwasher", he says. "But all my instincts were - go on, let's have a go." The teapot turned out to be heavily contaminated with polonium. It is now believed to have been the central instrument used to murder Litvinenko. The evidence gathered by the detectives ultimately helped bring about a six-month public inquiry led by Sir Robert Owen, the High Court judge. In January 2016 this concluded that Litvinenko's poisoning was "probably approved" by Nikolai Patrushev, former head of the FSB, and "also by President Putin". The Russian government denies the allegation and its prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev, said the inquiry was a "witch-hunt" with "no value whatsoever". Litvinenko's family have welcomed the verdict. "It's a huge victory and remarkable considering the forces that were behind my father's murder," says Anatoly Litvinenko. "When you consider the circumstances under which my father was murdered it is pretty amazing we got any semblance of justice at all." @richardkerbaj

Hunting the KGB Killers, produced by Richard Kerbaj, will be broadcast on April 17 at 9pm on Channel 4