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British Expulsion of Russian 'Diplomats' is Not a Challenge to Putin

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An expert in British foreign policy and public diplomacy claims that the expulsion of four Russian officials by the Brown Government is little more than a symbolic tactic.

Professor Scott Lucas argues, contrary to most analysis in today's press, that the British response to the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko is far from a sign of worsening relations between Russia and the West.

He says, "London could have taken far more significant steps to express their displeasure or expelled a far larger number of Russians. This step is more of a token gesture that 'something had to be done' over Moscow's refusal to extradite the chief suspect in the Litvinenko case."

He adds, "This puts little pressure on Vladimir Putin. The Russians might retaliate by expelling a few British diplomats, but they may also play it cool."

Professor Lucas says that today's news is secondary to the announcement, made by Putin on Saturday, that Russia is to pull out of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (signed by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 and re-confirmed between Russia and NATO in 1999) which provided a basis for lasting European stability and security.

"The Russian leadership is more concerned at this moment that the United States does not extend missile defence into Eastern Europe. So they will counter with political and economic gestures that keep Washington and NATO on the defensive. Britain is a secondary player in that game."

And as for Gordon Brown? Professor Lucas says, "It is worth remembering that back in 1971, Britain expelled more than 100 Russian diplomats. I don't think the current Prime Minister will be approaching that figure."

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Notes to Editors:

Prof Scott Lucas is professor of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham. He is an expert in American and British foreign policy and public diplomacy.

Prof Scott Lucas is available for interview. Please call the Press Office on 0121 414 6029 / 07920 593946 / a.i.mitchell@bham.ac.uk

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