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Unraveling Havana Syndrome: New evidence links the GRU's assassination Unit 29155 to mysterious attacks on U.S. officials and their families

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A yearlong investigation by *The Insider*, in collaboration with *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel*, has uncovered evidence suggesting that unexplained anomalous health incidents, also known as Havana Syndrome, may have their origin in the use of directed energy weapons wielded by members of Russian GRU Unit 29155. Members of the Kremlin's infamous military intelligence sabotage squad have been placed at the scene of suspected attacks on overseas U.S. government personnel and their family members, leading victims to question what Washington knows about the origins of Havana Syndrome, and what an appropriate Western response might entail.

Tbilisi

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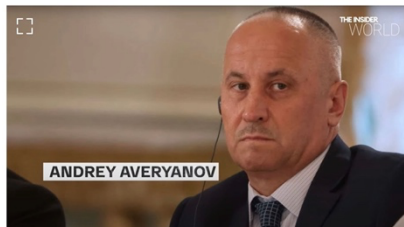
Minutes earlier on October 7, 2021, Joy, an American nurse and the wife of a U.S. Embassy official, had been taking her laundry out of the dryer when she was completely consumed by an acute ringing sound that reminded her of what someone in the movies experiences after a bomb has gone off. "It just pierced my ears, came in

my left side, felt like it came through the window, into my left ear,” Joy remembers. “I immediately felt fullness in my head, and just a piercing headache.” She ran out of the laundry room on the second floor of her house and into the bathroom adjoining the master bedroom. Then she vomited.

Joy and her husband, Hunter, a Justice Department attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, had only arrived in Georgia in Feb. 2020, right before the COVID-19 lockdown. Despite the “all-consuming” noise in her head, Joy called Hunter. (Both their names have been changed for this article to protect their identities.) As the spouse of a U.S. official serving abroad, she’d undergone overseas survival training and remembered that if something didn’t feel right, the first thing you do is “get off the X” – leave the location. Joy checked the house’s security camera at the front door to see if anyone was outside.

A black Mercedes crossover was parked just beyond the gate of her property, directly opposite her laundry room. Joy went outside, and that’s when she saw the tall, thin man. She raised her phone to photograph him.

“It was like he locked eyes with me. He knew what I was doing.” Then he got into the Mercedes, and it drove off. Joy took a picture of the car and its license plate as it pulled away. She says she didn’t see the man again until three years later, when she was shown a photograph of Albert Averyanov, a Russian operative attached to Unit 29155, a notorious assassination and sabotage squad of the GRU, Moscow’s military intelligence service.



Andrei Averyanov, founding commander of GRU Unit 29155
Screenshot of The Insider video interview with Christo Grozev

Albert is not an ordinary Russian spy. Aged only 23 when this encounter took place, he was the son of the founding commander of Unit 29155, Gen. Andrei Averyanov, 56, who is now the powerful deputy director of the GRU, tasked with running the Kremlin’s foreign policy in Africa. To the public, he was a fresh graduate of Moscow State University, where he had earned a masters’ in “management of migration processes,” a topic in which his father took a keen interest. Even within the nepotistic GRU, Albert’s trajectory was unusually steep — a young cadet who was being groomed for a bright career in espionage. In 2019, only 20, he’d even interned in Geneva with the *rezidentura* of Unit 29155, disguising his visit to the international Swiss capital as legions of other Russian intelligence officers have: as an English language-learning

trip. Such was Andrey's desire to see his son follow in his footsteps that the GRU had to ignore its own rules of recruitment, which mandate officers blend in with their surroundings. As a 6'2" young blonde, Albert was conspicuous in any crowd, let alone a tony suburb of Tbilisi.

When Joy saw Albert's face three years later, she had a "visceral" reaction. "I can absolutely say that this looks like the man that I saw in the street."

'Non-lethal Acoustic Weapons'

A yearlong investigation by *The Insider*, in collaboration with *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel*, has uncovered evidence suggesting that unexplained anonymous health incidents, also known as Havana Syndrome, may have their origin in the use of directed energy weapons wielded by members of Unit 29155.

Among this investigation's core findings is the fact that senior members of the unit received awards and political promotions for work related to the development of "non-lethal acoustic weapons," a term used in Russian military-scientific literature to describe both sound- and radiofrequency-based directed energy devices, as both would result in acoustic artifacts in the victim's brain.

These and other operatives attached to Unit 29155, traveling undercover, have been geolocated to places around the world just before or at the time of reported anomalous health incidents — or AHIs, as the U.S. government formally refers to Havana Syndrome. Furthermore, Joy is not the only victim to identify a known member of this Russian black ops squad lurking around her home.

The first sighting may have happened exactly seven years earlier. Contrary to the information that has been made public about Havana Syndrome — that it began in the eponymous Cuban capital in 2016 — there were likely attacks two years earlier in Frankfurt, Germany, when a U.S. government employee stationed at the consulate there was knocked unconscious by something akin to a strong energy beam. The victim was later diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury, and was also able to identify a Geneva-based Unit 29155 operative. (The incident occurred within months of Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, in which a stealthy, nearly bloodless seizure of the Crimean peninsula in Feb. and Mar. 2014 gave way to a roiling eight-year-long dirty war in the eastern industrial heartland of Donbas, close to Ukraine's border with Russia.)

The Insider, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* have uncovered documentary evidence that Unit 29155 has been experimenting with exactly the kind of weaponized technology

experts suggest is a plausible cause for the mysterious medical condition that has to date affected over a hundred far-flung U.S. spies and diplomats, as well as several Canadian officials. Many are seasoned subject matter specialists on Russia, fluent in the language; others have expertise in different fields, such as the Middle East or Latin America, but were assigned after the takeover of Crimea to sensitive U.S. government roles aimed at countermanning Russian aggression and intelligence operations across Europe and North America.

Unit 29155, moreover, is infamous within the U.S. intelligence community. “Their scope is global for conducting lethal operations and acts of sabotage,” a former high-ranking CIA officer with subject matter expertise in Russia told The Insider. “Their mission is to find, fix, and finish, all in support of Vladimir Putin’s imperial dreams.”

“Unit 29155’s scope is global for conducting lethal operations and acts of sabotage. Their mission is to find, fix, and finish, all in support of Vladimir Putin’s imperial dreams.”

Originally conceived as a training unit within the GRU, it was reorganized and expanded in 2008 as an operations team devoted to assassination, sabotage, and political destabilization campaigns across the world. Three members of this unit, Col. Alexander Mishkin, Col. Anatoliy Chepiga and Maj. Gen. Denis Sergeev, were responsible for poisoning British double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia with the military-grade nerve agent Novichok in Salisbury, England in 2018. In 2015, Denis Sergeev and other unit members twice poisoned Bulgarian arms dealer Emilian Gebrev with a similar organophosphate weapon, almost certainly because Gebrev’s company, EMCO, was selling ammunition to Georgia and Ukraine, two countries that had recently been at war with Russia. Unit 29155 also used Serbian mercenaries to orchestrate a failed coup in Montenegro on the eve of that nation’s accession to NATO in 2016. As *The Insider* was the first to report, the unit was responsible for a series of explosions at ammunition and weapons depots across Bulgaria and Czechia — explosions which began in 2011, two years after Unit 29155’s reconstitution as a black ops squad and right in the middle of the Obama administration’s “reset” with Moscow. (These operations injured or killed dozens of innocent bystanders; their exposures have led to the expulsion of 19 Russian diplomats from Sofia and Prague, respectively, as well as indictments by the Bulgarian government of all the Unit 29155 saboteurs implicated in bombings in that country.) More recently, members of the unit were deployed as an advanced sabotage-and-kill team in Ukraine in the days ahead of Russia’s full-scale invasion of the country, in late Feb. 2022.

Unlike other teams within Russia’s sprawling intelligence apparatus, this one doesn’t spy on people, at least not for the sake of gathering information. It is devoted exclusively to so-called kinetic — i.e. violent — military operations. Its predecessor and analog was the Soviet KGB’s department devoted to “special tasks,” which conducted assassinations and acts of terrorism abroad. Its most sinister spadework included

killing Ukrainian nationalists in Europe with bombs and cyanide guns and plunging an ice-axe into the skull of exiled revolutionary Leon Trotsky in Mexico in 1940.

Havana Syndrome, itself long thought to be the accrued biological effect caused by a different kind of unique weapon, encompasses a variation of symptoms including: chronic headaches, vertigo, tinnitus, insomnia, nausea, lasting psychophysiological impairment, and, in some cases, blindness or hearing loss. Many victims have said they were fine one minute, then stricken with an intense pain or pressure in their skull the next — usually localized to one side of the head, as if they were caught in a beam of concentrated energy. A good number have been diagnosed with mild traumatic brain injuries. Others have suffered such severe long-term cognitive and vestibular aftereffects that they can no longer function on a day-to-day basis and have been medically retired from government service.

Joy has suffered from headaches every day for the past three years. She has also undergone two surgeries for semicircular canal dehiscence (the appearance of holes in the bony walls that encase her inner ears). She will need a third surgery to address the rapid deterioration of her temporal bone, a condition she says her neurosurgeon cannot explain.

Havana Syndrome first gained public attention in 2017 in connection with strange ailments affecting more than twenty CIA and State Department officials posted to Cuba in the wake of revived diplomatic relations between the Obama administration and the government headed by Fidel Castro's brother Raúl.

Havana Syndrome first gained public attention in 2017 in connection with strange ailments affecting more than twenty CIA and State Department officials posted to Cuba in the wake of revived diplomatic relations between the Obama administration and the government headed by Fidel Castro's brother Raúl. The cases were recorded in Havana between May 2016 and September 2017, when the Trump administration radically reduced the State Department's presence on the Caribbean island and the CIA withdrew all of its personnel from the reopened U.S. Embassy there. But few in the intelligence community believed the Cubans were behind the phenomenon. Given Moscow's outsize influence on the Communist-run nation, the prevailing theory was that the Russians had carried out the attacks as part of an effort to hamper the U.S.-Cuban rapprochement.

Well over 100 AHI cases have been cited worldwide, affecting American spies, diplomats, military officers, contractors, and, in some instances, their spouses, children, and even household pets. Medically confirmed symptoms have been reported as far afield as Guangzhou, China, and as close to home as Washington, D.C. One victim was a senior official in the Trump-era National Security Council who became temporarily aphasic and whose body went numb right outside the Eisenhower

Executive Building in mid-November 2020. Another was CIA Director Bill Burns's then-deputy chief of staff, who was hit in Delhi in September 2021, causing Burns to cut short official visits to India and Pakistan. That same year, the Biden Administration signed into law the Havana Act, which provides six-figure compensation for confirmed victims of AHIs.

There is a reason why the Havana Act only came into force in 2021: for the past eight years, Havana Syndrome has been the subject of intense controversy. Sociologists have suggested it is little more than a mass psychogenic illness, or perhaps the outbreak of mass hysteria. Such arguments have been undercut by multiple medical studies, including one conducted by an expert panel convened by the U.S. intelligence community. The final assessment of that investigation [found](#) that AHIs had “a unique combination of core characteristics that cannot be explained by known environmental or medical conditions and could be due to external stimuli.” Nevertheless, in Mar. 2023, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) [issued a redacted report](#) stating that it was “very unlikely” that AHIs were caused by a foreign adversary. This assessment has sent shockwaves among the hundreds of former and current intelligence officers and their family members who believe they have suffered significant and often irreversible health consequences at the hands of an enemy force. As a result, many of these victims feel betrayed by their government for neglecting to identify the culprit for their predicament.

The Insider and its investigative partners have uncovered new evidence — in the form of intercepted Russian intelligence documents, travel logs, and call metadata, along with eyewitness testimony — the totality of which challenges the assessment made by the ODNI. Adam, a pseudonym adopted by Patient Zero, the first CIA officer to be stricken with Havana Syndrome in Cuba, told *The Insider*, “What this long-term investigation has shown is that either the intelligence community is incapable of carrying out its most basic function, or it has worked to cover up the facts and gaslight injured employees and the public.”

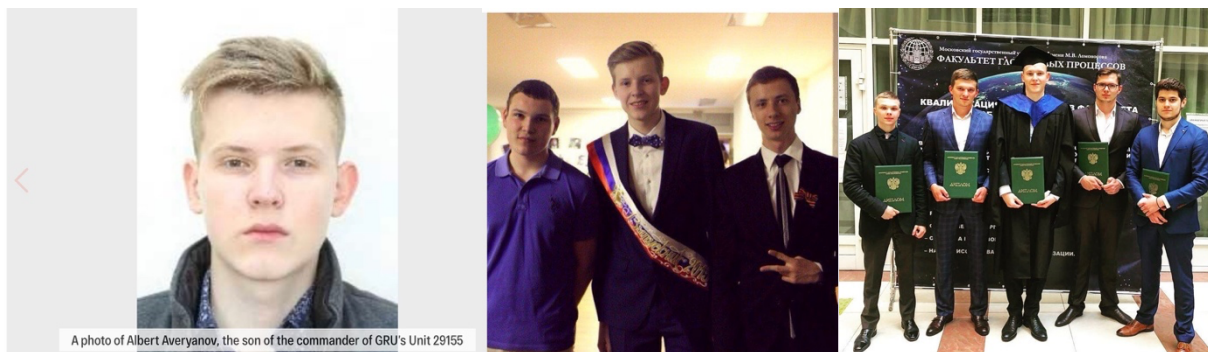
Greg Edgreen, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, set up the working group investigating Havana Syndrome for the Defense Intelligence Agency, or DIA, from 2020 to 2023. The role gave him access to classified intelligence compiled not just by the Pentagon, but by other agencies within the U.S. intelligence community. In response to this investigation, Edgreen told *60 Minutes*: “If I'm wrong about Russia being behind anomalous health incidents, I will come onto your show. And I will eat my tie.”

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence is currently investigating how U.S. spy agencies reached their nothing-to-see-here assessment in March 2023. Given the DIA working group's contribution to the ODNI report, which acknowledges varying levels of confidence reached by different agencies, Edgreen's unambiguous attribution

of culpability to Moscow should raise eyebrows in the U.S. intelligence community and in Congress. Another organization said to be skeptical that a foreign adversary is not behind Havana Syndrome is the National Security Agency, which deals in signals intelligence, or intercepted communications.

The Son Also Rises

Joy's identification of Albert Averyanov outside her home in Tbilisi is backed up by two U.S. government officials who told *60 Minutes* that the Russian operative was indeed in the Georgian capital around the time of her attack.



Just a few short years before his graduation from Moscow State University in 2019, Albert was already being groomed by his father at 16 to take over Unit 29155. Albert unofficially “trained” in Geneva under the supervision of Col. Egor Gordienko, 45, who was then stationed in the city under diplomatic cover as Russia’s second trade representative at the World Trade Organization. Following his apprenticeship, Albert became an active member of Unit 29155, as evidenced by call data *The Insider*, *60 Minutes*, and *Der Spiegel* obtained demonstrating his constant communication with other operatives from the group, as well as travel records showing his joint trips with known 29155 officers.



A childhood photo of Albert Averyanov, posted on his now-defunct VKontakte social media account

For a GRU operative, Albert lives a remarkably open life on social media. He plays basketball and soccer and travels by plane around the world under his legal name, posting updates of his game history with the Moscow-based amateur Evian soccer club ([zero goals](#) in 60 matches), and photos of himself with his girlfriend, Nastya, on joyrides in his Mercedes-Benz ML/GLE. But as has already been noted, Albert's travels haven't always been of the touristy kind. Leaked airline data shows that some of his most eyebrow-raising flights are booked by Unit 29155's human resources department.

For example, both Albert and his father Andrey Averyanov left Moscow on September 30, 2021, eight days before Joy spotted the person she believes was Averyanov the younger outside her home in Tbilisi. Father and son flew to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and only returned to Moscow eleven days later, on October 10. But Tashkent was not their final destination.

Andrey turned off his phone in the Russian capital and never switched it back on until he had landed on October 10, calling his driver from the airport. Albert took his with him and did not immediately switch it off. He received a call from an unidentified Uzbek number at 8:04 a.m. on October 1, the morning after he and Andrey had arrived in Tashkent. Albert's phone was then turned off. Thirty-six minutes later, at 8:40 a.m., a flight took off from Tashkent to Tbilisi. (There were no direct flights between Russia and the Georgian capital in 2021, owing to a diplomatic spat between the two countries, and members of Unit 29155 anyway use decoy transit destinations to avoid being traced to a particular attack or incident, as *The Insider* has as [previously reported](#).)

Over the next ten days, Albert's phone remained off, meaning that its geolocation metadata for this period cannot be obtained. What is visible is that the phone was roaming, and Albert's cellular plan did not allow for him to receive incoming calls or connect to the internet. However, on the evening of October 9, the eve of the father-son duo's return trip from Tashkent to Moscow, Albert evidently turned his phone back on because he received an automated message from his mobile operator, Beeline, welcoming him to Uzbekistan. That message indicates that Albert had been outside the country in the preceding days, and had only re-entered Uzbekistan on the day before his onward trip to Moscow.

When *The Insider* telephoned Albert to ask if he was in Tbilisi at the time of the alleged attacks on U.S. diplomats and their families, he listened to the question, then over-excitedly asked who was on the other end of the line. "Stop, stop, who's calling me?" When told it was the editor-in-chief of *The Insider*, he immediately hung up.

The Frankfurt Attacks

Seven years earlier and almost two thousand miles to the West, in November 2014 in Frankfurt, Germany, two separate attacks had occurred one after the other, according to multiple sources. One of those sources, Mark Lenzi, 49, is a current State Department official.

Lenzi, his wife, son, and daughter, were all medevaced from Guangzhou, China in early June 2018 after they each failed brain injury tests. According to Lenzi, he and his family have been compensated by the U.S. government with “more than a million dollars because of our diagnosed traumatic brain injuries” in a combination of civil litigation settlements and Havana Act payments. In November 2014, Lenzi was working in the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt as its regional security officer when his colleagues succumbed to the same health incident that he and his household would experience years later on another continent.

“The 2014 Frankfurt attacks were always key in that they came before the Cuba and China hits and should have received the most attention from the U.S. Government.”

“The 2014 Frankfurt attacks were always key in that they came before the Cuba and China hits and should have received the most attention from the U.S. Government,” Lenzi told *The Insider*, *60 Minutes*, and *Der Spiegel*.

One victim, according to Lenzi and other sources, was a U.S. government employee at the consulate, whom *The Insider* will call Taylor. For Taylor, the symptoms began as an intense feeling of pressure, which started in the torso and radiated up to the head and neck. Then there was nausea, followed by a “high-pitched squeal.” Taylor raced to a bathroom to vomit before collapsing unconscious on the floor. At St. Marie Hospital, located within minutes of the consulate, Taylor was diagnosed by German doctors on November 4, 2014 with vestibular neuronitis, the sudden onset of vertigo, replete with nausea, vomiting, and a rise in blood pressure. Once back in the United States, Taylor was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury.

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ALEXANDER MISHKIN
(Alexander «Petrov»)



DENIS SERGEEV
(«Sergey Fedotov»)



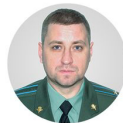
EGOR GORDIENKO
(«Georgy Gorshkov»)



NIKOLAY EZHOV
(Nikolay «Kononikhin»)



DANIL KAPRALOV
(Danil «Stepanov»)



IVAN TERYTYEV
(Ivan «Lebedev»)



ALEXANDER KOVALCHUK
(Alexander «Danilin»)

WINTER 2014. PREPARATION.

Mishkin and Sergeev arrive in Prague 26/01

Rent a car for 2 days in Munich { 30/01

From Prague they fly back to Moscow { 01/02
02/02

AUTUMN 2014. THE MAIN PART OF THE OPERATION.

Sergeev flew from Moscow to Milan, Gordienko to Paris 25/09

In Geneva, Sergeev and Gordienko rent a car for 5 days { 26/09
01/10

Yezhov arrives in Vienna 11/10

Gordienko and Sergeev return to Moscow 13/10

Kapralov joins Yezhov and Terentyev 15/10

Kovalchuk arrives in Paris 17/10

Kovalchuk returns to Moscow via Kyiv 24/10

Yezhov flies to Moscow from Vienna,
Terentyev and Kapralov from Geneva
In Frankfurt, US consulate officials face
a series of strange attacks { 03/11
04/11

In the weeks leading up to the attack, Taylor remembers confronting a tall, muscular man with a military bearing acting suspiciously across the road from the consulate residential complex. The unknown man was dressed in casual street clothes, and was pacing the length of a housing unit while inspecting and photographing parked vehicles with U.S. diplomatic plates. After a brief exchange with Taylor, the man responded with a strong Russian accent, shutting down the encounter and running off.

Via a third party, *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* was able to share with Taylor two photographs of Gordienko — later to become Albert Averyanov’s mentor — whom the investigative team has reason to believe had been in the Frankfurt area as part of an advance reconnaissance team just before the attack. One of the photographs was taken in 2015, the other in 2017. Taylor did not hesitate in confirming that Gordienko was the suspect skulking around outside U.S. consulate housing.

“Yes, that’s him,” Taylor said. “I’m getting goosebumps looking at him now.”



Egor Gordienko

Euromaidan and the New Era of Special Tasks

2014 was a busy year for Unit 29155. In the last months of 2013, as street protests against Ukraine’s former president, Viktor Yanukovich, were reaching boiling point, several members of the unit had been dispatched under cover identities into Ukraine, arguably to thwart a pro-Western revolution. The spies' efforts had clearly failed in Ukraine, and they were redirected to disrupting or hurting Ukraine’s partners abroad.

One team of the unit’s operatives, traveling under fake identities to and from Europe, infiltrated a Czech Ministry of Defense-controlled munitions storage facility in the town of Vrbětice in the southeastern Moravian region of Czechia. They planted explosives and blew up a consignment of artillery ammunition, owned by Emilian Gebrev’s EMCO and believed by the GRU to have been bound for Ukraine. That same year, another Unit 29155 team made repeat trips to and from Germany. For instance, on January 26, 2014, Maj. Gen. Denis Sergeev and Alexander Mishkin landed in Prague. From there, travel data obtained by *The Insider*, *60 Minutes*, and *Der Spiegel* show they took the train to Munich, where, on January 30, they rented a car. Sergeev and Mishkin’s whereabouts were lost for the next 40 hours, but they did return their rental car the next evening in Munich. Then they returned by train to Prague. Sergeev and Mishkin flew back to Moscow on February 2.

As a rule, spies always leave misleading traces in their air travel, avoiding trips directly to their destination of interest, and sometimes investing hours — or even days — in diversionary travel by train or car.

The use of a sinuous route is part of the GRU's operational tradecraft — a means of throwing off counterintelligence services with false trails. As a rule, spies always leave misleading traces in their air travel, avoiding trips directly to their destination of interest, and sometimes investing hours — or even days — in diversionary travel by train or car. Additional motivation for the Russian spies to enter the common European space via a country different than the target destination was linked to the fact they had been issued visas by different European countries; the agents anticipated lesser scrutiny at the border if they entered through the country that had issued their visa.

What were Sergeev and Mishkin doing in Germany? Neither conducts pure espionage for the GRU, as their later operational activity makes clear. A year later, Sergeev would serve as the operational commander of Unit 29155 who oversaw the Gebrev poisonings — he's even filmed on CCTV in the parking garage of Gebrev's EMCO office building in Sofia, evidently searching for the target's vehicle where, Bulgarian authorities believe, an organophosphate chemical weapon similar to Novichok was laced on the driver's side door handle. Still later, Sergeev established an operational headquarters at a low-rent hotel in Paddington, London, while Mishkin, along with his Unit 29155 accomplice Antaoly Chepiga, took a train to Salisbury to slather Novichok contained in a false Nina Ricci perfume bottle on the front door handle of 47 Christie Miller Road, home to Sergei Skripal. Their travel to Central Europe strongly indicates they were on a similar mission, or laying the groundwork for one, such as reconnoitering a target.

Making this assumption even more persuasive is the fact that in late September 2014, members of Unit 29155 — Sergeev included — began a series of staggered trips to Central and Western Europe, trips which typically signify the preparatory phase for a major sabotage or assassination operation.

On September 25, Sergeev flew from Moscow to Milan. Several months earlier he had obtained an Italian-issued multi-entry Schengen visa, affording him easy access, absent any border control checks, to, at that time, 26 European countries including Switzerland. Yet, he preferred to enter the common European space via the country that had issued him the visa. That same day, Col. Evgeny Kalinin, another member of the unit, flew to Budapest posing as a Russian diplomatic mail courier. He returned to Moscow two days later. Finally, Gordienko, the Unit 29155 operative Taylor later saw milling about U.S. consulting housing in Frankfurt, arrived in Paris from Moscow on a French-issued Schengen visa.

Gordienko and Sergeev took trains from their respective decoy destinations to the same place, Geneva, where they checked into the Nash Airport hotel on the evening of September 26. Whether they stayed there or not is unknown but, on October 6, they registered new rooms at the Geneva Airport Novotel Suites — rooms they kept, according to receipts examined by *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel*, until October 13.

On September 27, the day after they checked into the Nash hotel, Gordienko rented a car from Sixt for five days. (A subsequent car rental on October 2 was canceled.) No further digital traces were left by him or Sergeev until their return to Moscow via separate routes on October 13.

But the timing of this trip is telling. It tracks with when Taylor saw Gordienko in Frankfurt, weeks before the attack. Once ensconced in a hotel near Geneva's airport which they kept booked for a total of 18 days, Gordienko and Sergeev could have easily boarded flights to and from Frankfurt using fictitious identities, given they were in the Schengen zone and thus subject to no internal security checks (most European airlines do not check ID documents upon boarding for intra-Schengen destinations)

They weren't the only GRU operatives flying to the region.

On October 11, a trio of seemingly unrelated Russian tourists began descending on Western Europe, all traveling under fake identities. All three were members of Unit 29155.

The most senior of them was Col. Ivan Terentiev, a deputy to unit commander Andrey Averyanov. Equipped with an Italian visa, Terentiev flew from Moscow to Milan. His aide, Lt. Col. Nikolay Ezhov, flew from Moscow to Vienna, also on October 11.



Three days later, on October 15, Terentiev and Ezhov were joined by a third colleague, Danil Kapralov, a member of Unit 29155 with a medical background. Kapralov flew to Amsterdam. But booking data obtained by *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der*

Spiegel shows that on 15 October he checked in to the Starling Hotel Residence in Geneva and paid 3,000 Swiss francs (about \$3,300) for his room through November 3.

Whatever Terentiev, Ezhov and Kapralov were in Western Europe to do, they clearly had to be done by that date, as all three purchased return tickets back to Moscow, each traveling from the point of arrival in Europe.

Taylor was knocked unconscious the next day, November 4.

The Ghosts of Kyiv Station

The winter of 2014 was also a busy time for Ukrainians.

Incensed by then-President Viktor Yanukovych's about-face on his campaign promise to move the country closer to the European Union, thousands of citizens participated in a months-long protest movement that turned Kyiv's central square — the Maidan — into a barricaded encampment. Euromaidan, the name given to the demonstration, culminated in late Feb. 2014 in a series of seismic events. The first was a violent crackdown on the protestors, instigated by Yanukovych's security forces at the prompting of Russian intelligence, that involved the deployment of snipers to kill or wound more than 100 protesters. Soon after the massacre, Yanukovych, again with the help of Russian operatives, fled from Ukraine to Russia. Vladimir Putin had already ordered his military to occupy Crimea — home to Sevastopol, the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet — and after an unfree, unfair, hastily organized "referendum," the peninsula was illegally annexed by Russia on Mar. 18. But Russian forces did not stop there, unleashing a plausibly deniable proxy war in the eastern Ukrainian Donbas region in the guise of a "separatist" insurgency that, after a few months of heavy fighting, settled into a lower-level territorial standoff that simmered until Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in Feb. 2022.

Largely as a result of Russia's aggressive actions, a new political consensus was forming in the unoccupied parts of Ukraine. Ukraine's push for independence in 1991 may have precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union, but for the next two decades, Ukrainian society would remain divided between those who sought integration with Europe and those who favored a path that would keep the country closer to Russia — culturally and economically, if not politically. 2014 was a turning point. For the first time, polls showed a majority of Ukrainians favoring future membership in NATO, and even though Kyiv's accession to the North Atlantic alliance likely remains years away, expanded intelligence cooperation does not require the consensus vote of NATO's 32 member states.

As was recently reported by *The New York Times*, the CIA enormously expanded its cooperation with Ukraine's military intelligence service, HUR, in the years following Euromaidan. Starting in 2015, that cooperation has transformed Kyiv into "one of Washington's most important intelligence partners against the Kremlin today," according to the *Times*. Ukrainian spies trained by the CIA would later be deployed to Russia, Europe, and even Cuba. Today they are capable of launching drones at oil refineries and strategic railways deep inside Russia, even at the Kremlin itself. They have also destroyed a third of Russia's Black Sea Fleet without the benefit of a bona fide Ukrainian navy.

Cooperation with the CIA since 2015 has transformed Kyiv into "one of Washington's most important intelligence partners against the Kremlin today," according to the NYT

Distinguished HUR operatives, such as the service's current director, Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, cut their teeth in a Ukrainian commando group, Unit 2245, trained by the CIA's paramilitary force, or Ground Department. And Moscow was certainly aware of the collaboration. Russians blew up the car of Col. Maksim Shapoval, the head of Unit 2245, while he was on his way to meet with CIA officers from Kyiv Station, the agency's office embedded within the U.S. Embassy.

The hyperactive CIA outpost in the Ukrainian capital was, as one former U.S. intelligence official put it, responsible for "installing the plumbing" within HUR. *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* can now reveal for the first time the extent to which that CIA station was subsequently impacted by Havana Syndrome.

The hyperactive CIA outpost in the Ukrainian capital was, as one former U.S. intelligence official put it, responsible for "installing the plumbing" within HUR

Two CIA officers posted to Kyiv during that period of intense collaboration between U.S. and Ukrainian intelligence later experienced AHIs after being posted to new missions overseas. One, the incoming chief of station in Hanoi, Vietnam, was hit while domiciled in temporary housing at the Oakwood Residence Suites hotel in the Vietnamese capital in August 2021, amid lockdown conditions connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another officer, who became deputy chief of station in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, was hit in his apartment in that city in December 2020, along with his wife and child. He and his family had to be medevaced out of Tashkent and received treatment at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The incoming Hanoi chief of station was also medevaced out of Vietnam and received treatment at Walter Reed. Additionally, the wife of a third CIA officer who had served in Kyiv during the same critical time frame — roughly 2014 to 2017 — was hit in October 2021 in a cafe in London. She was treated locally in London and is also in the CIA.

The cluster of Havana Syndrome cases that emerged from veterans of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv was so worrisome to one of its number that he opted to resign from the CIA altogether rather than risk becoming another victim.

Of all the cases examined by *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel*, the most well-documented involve U.S. intelligence and diplomatic personnel with subject matter expertise in Russia or operational experience in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, two post-Soviet states that have undergone pro-Western “color revolutions” in the past two decades. (Some of these personnel are still active and declined to speak for this article.)

Putin himself has not shied away from laying blame for these pro-democratic protest movements at the doorstep of Langley or Foggy Bottom — or both. As recently as his [Feb. 9 interview with former Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson](#), Putin peddled the conspiracy theory that Euromaidan was not the work of discontented Ukrainians at all. “The CIA completed its job in implementing the coup d’état,” the Russian head of state told Carlson.

Putin would have every interest, in other words, in neutralizing scores of U.S. intelligence officers he deemed responsible for his loss of the former satellites or constituent pieces of the former Soviet empire. Ukraine is the lynchpin nation in Putin’s grand design to “reestablish the Soviet Union,” as President Biden phrased it on Feb. 24, 2022, the date of Russia’s full-scale invasion.

Greg Edgreen, the former DIA investigator of Havana Syndrome, told *60 Minutes*, that his working group pored through “a large body of data, ranging from signals intelligence, human intelligence, open-source reporting. Anything regarding the internet, travel records, financial records, you name it. And we kept on seeing a number of data points. This was happening to our top 5%, 10% performing officers across the Defense Intelligence Agency. Consistently there was a Russia nexus. There was some angle where they had worked against Russia, focused on Russia, and done extremely well.”

Marc Polymeropolous is a highly decorated former CIA officer, whose last title was Chief of Operation for the agency’s Europe and Eurasia Mission Center, which is in charge of all clandestine activity in over forty countries. Polymeropoulos, now an *MSNBC* contributor, is also one of the most outspoken victims of Havana Syndrome, and an advocate for healthcare for fellow CIA officers affected by it. He was hit at the height of his career, in December 2017, while in Moscow on an official CIA visit to liaise with Russian counterparts about counterterrorism cooperation between Washington and Moscow. (In tandem with this investigation, *The Insider* is publishing

his first-hand account of that experience and its aftermath, which forced his retirement from the CIA. His memoir can be [read here](#).)

“Assuming this is true, it certainly fits the pattern of the Russians seeking retribution for events they think we’re responsible for. As a former CIA case officer, I don’t believe in coincidences.”

The Insider, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* presented Polymeropoulos with its findings: that multiple CIA officers who had worked cheek-by-jowl with HUR a decade or so ago were affected by Havana Syndrome later in their careers. “Assuming this is true, it certainly fits the pattern of the Russians seeking retribution for events they think we’re responsible for,” he said. “As a former CIA case officer, I don’t believe in coincidences.”

The GRUs Amazing Race

Just as reports of curious ailments experienced by U.S. officials working for the State and Commerce Departments began emerging from China in 2016 and 2017, one of Sergei Skripal’s poisoners crossed into the country, disguised among a group of Russian auto mechanics.

The Silk Way Rally, an off-road racing event, was founded in 2009 as a kind of intercontinental SCORE International. Originally limited to the expanse of Russia and Central Asia, by 2016 the course ran all the way from Moscow to Xi’an, an ancient city in China that once marked the easternmost end of the Silk Road. With legitimate sponsorship deals and celebrity offroad race car drivers — Vladimir Chagin, who holds the record for the most victories at the Dakar Rally, is director of Silk Way, and his number two is Frederic Lequien, the CEO of the FIA World Endurance Championship — the race covers a ground distance of nearly 4,400 miles. In other words, it’s a convenient conduit for moving people and hardware across the globe.

Which is maybe why the Silk Way Rally [is a GRU front](#).

Bulat Yanborisov, its head, was awarded his second Order of Nevsky, a prestigious Russian military award, by GRU Deputy Director Gen. Vladimir Alexeev at an elaborate ceremony in Moscow in April 2023. (A video of that ceremony was [obtained by The Insider](#).)

Internal documents pertaining to Silk Way Rally also explicitly state that the true purpose of this seemingly apolitical sports competition is to create a “universal platform for people’s diplomacy,” premised on the notion of “Russia’s soft power.” The

Kremlin hoped to unite Russia, China, Iran, Qatar, Afghanistan, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, and to construct “logistics terminals” in each of these countries — complete with storage facilities and 5G communications hubs. (Expanded routes for the rally were meant to bypass these countries, but Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 put paid to that ambition.)

However, this “soft power” mandate appears to have been simply a cover for the true functions of the Silk Way Rally. Yanborisov’s phone records show he was in constant communication with GRU spies, including members of Unit 29155. Using reverse face-search tools, *The Insider* was able to identify members of the unit who were disguised as staff working for the rally. The self-styled sports organization also purchased tickets for members traveling under false identities.

One of these was the man who turned a sleepy English cathedral city into a quarantine zone.

On July 6, 2016, Alexander Mishkin, one of Unit 29155’s medical doctors and one of the two hitmen tasked by Andrey Averyanov with killing Sergei and Yulia Skripal with Novichok, embedded with a convoy of Silk Way Rally cars and trucks. His racing companions included other members of Unit 29155: Alexey Kalinin, who took part in one of the Bulgaria bombings in 2015; Alexey Tolstopyatenko, who runs the unit’s Azerbaijani and Turkish operations, posing as an ethnic Tajik; and Roman Puntus, an explosives expert now working in occupied Crimea.

Данные по БД "Спрена"			
Личо	Рейс	Отправление	Куплен
PETROV ALEXANDER 643258115 ДР:13.07.1979 M RUS	6-SU	26.07.2016 07:10 ШЕРЕМЕТЬЕВО (МОСКВА)-ПУЛКОВО (САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГ)	26.07.2016 01:12 РЕГИСТРАЦИЯ 0 *GMT*
PETROV ALEXANDER 643258115 ДР:13.07.1979 M RUS	6-SU	26.07.2016 07:10 ШЕРЕМЕТЬЕВО (МОСКВА)-ПУЛКОВО (САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГ)	25.07.2016 20:58 БРОНИРОВАНИЕ 0 *GMT*
PETROV ALEXANDER 643258115 ДР:13.07.1979 M RUS	201-SU	25.07.2016 21:30 BEIJING CAPITAL INT. (ПЕК-ШЕРЕМЕТЬЕВО (МОСКВА))	25.07.2016 21:45 ВЫЛЕТ 0 *GMT*
PETROV ALEXANDER 643258115 ДР:13.07.1979 M RUS	201-SU	25.07.2016 21:30 BEIJING CAPITAL INT. (ПЕК-ШЕРЕМЕТЬЕВО (МОСКВА))	25.07.2016 11:18 БРОНИРОВАНИЕ 0 *GMT*
PETROV ALEXANDER 643258115 ДР:13.07.1979 M RUS	201-SU	25.07.2016 21:30 BEIJING CAPITAL INT. (ПЕК-ШЕРЕМЕТЬЕВО (МОСКВА))	25.07.2016 18:33 РЕГИСТРАЦИЯ 0 *GMT*

Leaked flight database shows Alexander Mishkin (Petrov) returning from Beijing and flying straight to St. Petersburg

Three days later, on July 9, the rally officially started, and any trace of the racers was lost for almost two weeks thereafter. Then, on July 25, Mishkin appeared on a flight from Beijing to Moscow, traveling on a joint booking together with Yanborisov, the Silk Way Rally head. Immediately upon his return, Mishkin traveled on to St. Petersburg to meet with Sergei Chepur, head of the Russian Defense Ministry’s Research Testing Institute of Military Medicine, the GRU’s entity for testing the effects of various types of toxic substances — such as the Novichok used to poison the Skripals — on the human body. Chepur is a consultant to Unit 29155 commander, Andrey Averyanov. Mishkin is one of Chepur’s former students.

In 2017 the Silk Way Rally returned to China along the same racing route. This time, another member of Unit 29155, Sergey Avdeenko, joined the convoy, masquerading as a car technician. Avdeenko entered China on July 12 and flew from Xi'an to the Siberian city of Novosibirsk on July 23.



Sergey Avdeenko, a member of Unit 29155, smiling in the background and disguised as staff at the Silk Way Rally in China in 2017

The summer of 2017 is when Mark Lenzi, the State Department official in Guangzhou, first began experiencing strange health problems, as did Catherine Werner, a Commerce Department official in the city. Like Lenzi, Werner would be medevaced out of China. She was diagnosed with an “organic brain injury.” The State Department ultimately evacuated more than ten of its people from Guangzhou.

Another U.S. Commerce Department official stationed in Beijing began having symptoms and hearing strange sounds and feeling pressure in her head while at home in October of 2017, just before a visit to China by President Trump that November. She was also medevaced for treatment in the United States.

Lenzi is a fluent Russian speaker who studied in Lithuania on a Fulbright scholarship and has worked in official capacities as a diplomat in Russia. “I absolutely believe my background on Russia is why I was targeted,” Lenzi told *The Insider*.

“The U.S. government shrugs publicly about my family’s ordeal,” he said. “But U.S. government personnel behind closed doors have acknowledged to me that my and my family’s diagnosed traumatic brain injuries are due to exposure to high levels of pulsed microwave radiation.”

Pulsed microwave radiation is one of two technologies that scientists — including those assigned by the U.S. intelligence community to investigate Havana Syndrome — have theorized as the possible cause of the condition. The other is acoustic sound.

Either of these approaches may result in the victim appearing to hear audible sounds, hums and clicks, through a phenomenon termed the Frey Effect, named for Allan H. Frey, the American scientist who first wrote about the microwave auditory effect.

Russia has been experimenting with both for decades.

In fact, in its corpus of scientific literature the two phenomena are conflated into a common category of “wave weapons.” A Soviet patent from 1974 was issued to a military unit that developed – and claimed to have successfully tested – a “non-lethal device inducing sleep in the target via the use of radio-waves.” A [series of studies](#) by Soviet and Russian scientists from 1991 to 2012 focused on the transmission of simulated auditory information to targets using ultra-high radio frequencies. And *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* can now reveal, senior members of Unit 29155 were themselves tasked with, and rewarded for, successfully testing “non-lethal acoustic weapons.”

A Promotion – and a Prize

Col. Ivan Terentiev spent a decade as the deputy commander of the unit, and held an additional ominous title of «commander of group for special tasks of Unit 29155». In January 2024, the Bulgarian government issued a European Arrest Warrant for Terentiev owing to his personal involvement in the destruction of Bulgarian arms facilities beginning in 2011. When he wasn’t busy blowing up military depots in the Balkans, Terentiev, a trained engineer, also moonlighted as a research and development specialist for Russia’s Ministry of Defense. In that capacity he co-wrote dozens of military-scientific papers, including one on the “effectiveness of underwater shooting.” He’s also spent time exploring acoustic weapons.

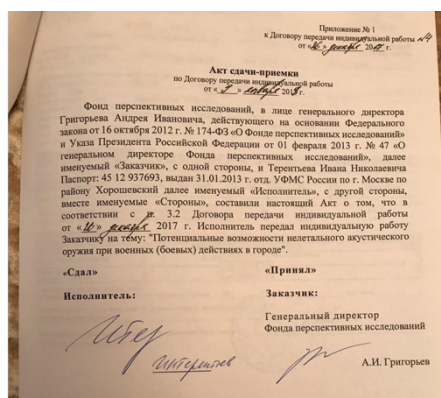
In mid 2019, Terentiev was suddenly promoted to a Kremlin position. As part of the vetting process, he had to explain to the Kremlin why he had failed to declare a bank account into which he received an unaccounted-for transfer of funds in late 2017. Part of this disbursement had come from Terentiev’s handing over the intellectual property rights of his research and inventions to the Ministry of Defense. Namely, he had provided research work on developing a new weapon for the Foundation for Advanced Military Research. One of Vladimir Putin’s pet projects, the foundation was created in 2012 with a mandate for building “innovative weapons including [ones] based on new physical properties,” as its website states, and “[to close a gap](#) in advanced research with our Western partners after 20 years of stagnation in the Russian military science and defense industry overall.”

Terentiev's prized research was focused on the "potential capabilities of non-lethal acoustic weapons in combat activities in urban settings," according to an addendum *The Insider* obtained from an email account belonging to Nikolay Ezhov, Terentiev's aide in Unit 29155 and his travel companion to Europe in 2014, just before Taylor's attack.

Ezhov had emailed the addendum to the anti-corruption office in Putin's Presidential Administration in an attempt to explain how 100,000 rubles – the equivalent of around \$1,700 at the time – wound up in Terentiev's checking account. That sum was symbolic; the real reward was Terentiev's new job.

The reason for his financial vetting was that the GRU saboteur was being promoted to a prestigious political position, that of Putin's federal inspector for the Far Eastern Sakhalin region. In Russia, a federal inspector has oversight over a regional governor, affording Terentiev ample opportunities for kickbacks and self-enrichment. Also, given his continued tenure in Unit 29155, Terentiev would have greater oversight over Sakhalin's neighbors, Japan, China and South Korea. Ezhov, meanwhile, was named deputy director of Sakhalin before receiving his own plum assignment in 2020 as federal inspector for Yakutia, the largest republic in Russia, replete with natural resources such as oil, gas and 99% of the country's diamond reserves.

Few Russian intelligence officers with no public profile, discernible bureaucratic profile or personal ties to Putin reach such dizzying heights. So what accounts for Terentiev and Ezhov's elevation?



A scan of the addendum sent by Lt. Col. Nikolay Ezhov, one of Col. Ivan Terentiev's aides and a fellow member of Unit 29155, which shows that Terentiev's prize is related to his research on the "potential capabilities of non-lethal acoustic weapons in combat activities in urban settings."

Operation Reduktor

The Insider, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* have obtained a set of intelligence documents describing a classified Soviet-era program codenamed *Reduktor*, or "Gearbox." Begun

in 1984 at the Radio Technical Measurement Research Institute in Kharkiv, Ukraine, *Reduktor's* central task was to study the uses of “electromagnetic radiation to influence the behavior and reactions of biological objects, [including] people.” The institute was subordinated to the Soviet Ministry of General Machine Building, which oversaw the Soviet Union’s space exploration program. (Today its successor is Russia’s Federal Space Agency, Roscosmos.) The head of the research institute, according to the documents, flew to Moscow almost weekly to report on the progress of his work.

In 1988, the institute initiated a top secret program for which a separate department, known as the Eighth Branch, was created. About 300 employees worked for the Eighth Branch, whose activities were kept secret from the rest of the institute. Most of its employees were scientists, either active in the Soviet military or retired from it. Engineers and biologists predominated the ranks. Also on staff were psychiatrists. There was strict compartmentalization of work within Eighth Branch, such that one team didn’t know what another was working on and all employees were forbidden from recruiting scientists from other departments within the Research Institute.

Eighth Branch scientists experimented with electromagnetic energy on rats and rhesus monkeys. Some of the animals died from exposure to thermal radiation; others developed brain damage. “The main goal,” according to one *Reduktor* document, “was to create a stable mechanism of information influence (i.e., forcing the object to take certain actions by influencing the brain and other organs) using a low-energy effect with a power flux density of no more than 10 microwatts per square centimeter.”

Coinciding with the end of the Soviet Union — and, with it, Ukraine’s independence — *Reduktor's* entire scientific yield was transferred from Kharkiv to Moscow by the KGB for further development.

The *Reduktor* documents indicate that a blueprint model of an electromagnetic device was clunky and conspicuous: “a large dish on an automobile chassis with generators, antennas and other equipment.” Soviet experts were confident that a smaller, more mobile version of such a weapon could eventually be created, with an effective firing range of at least 100 meters.

Separately, in 2010, another scientific research institute in Russia carried out work on the “development of basic technologies for the creation of a new generation of sonar and acoustic weapons systems,” according to another document *The Insider*, 60 *Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* have obtained. Under this contemporary program, “an experimental model/prototype” of portable ultrasonic non-lethal weapons was constructed such that it could be mounted onto commercial vehicles. The radial range of this device was limited to between ten and twelve meters. In February-March 2014, the total yield of this study in sonar and acoustic systems – the technical documents

and an experimental device – came into the possession of the GRU in Sevastopol, in concert with Russia’s takeover of Crimea.

In September 2022, the U.S. intelligence community released a classified report titled, “Anomalous Health Incidents: Analysis of Potential Causal Mechanisms,” a redacted copy of which was obtained under a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by Mark Zaid, a lawyer for more than two dozen victims of Havana Syndrome. The report gives four “core characteristics” of AHIs: “the acute onset of audiovestibular sensory phenomena, including sound and/or pressure, sometimes in only one ear or on one side of the head; ...other nearly simultaneous signs and symptoms such as vertigo, loss of balance, and ear pain; ...a strong sense of locality or directionality; and...the absence of known environmental or medical conditions that could explain the reported signs and symptoms.”

One plausible cause for these symptoms, the report states, is microwave energy. Another is ultrasound, a high-frequency form of inaudible acoustic energy that can enter the body through the ear canal or other aspects of the head, causing potential disruption of the central nervous system — especially of the inner ear, where sound and balance are sensed. Both microwave and ultrasound energy can damage cells in the brain as well as open the blood-brain barrier, causing proteins from the damaged cells to leak into the spinal fluid and then into the bloodstream. These so-called biomarkers are metabolized by the body within hours to days, meaning that someone hit with an acoustic weapon would need to have their blood drawn almost immediately after an attack to detect this kind of evidence of injury.

The former Kyiv Station CIA officer who was hit in Hanoi in 2021 was one of only two victims of Havana Syndrome whose biomarkers had been measured before the attack, thus establishing an individualized baseline. In this officer’s case, the biomarker levels jumped from normal before the attack to far above normal hours after; they then returned to normal days later, clearly indicating brain injury at the time of the attack, according to multiple sources within the U.S. intelligence community. He was diagnosed with “neural network dysfunction and persistent dysautonomia due to traumatic brain injury.”

And yet it remains unclear exactly how the attacks were carried out, or whether multiple types of devices have been used. The limiting factor with ultrasound weapons is distance. Their soundwaves travel poorly through air and solid objects found in buildings, meaning any device of this type would have to get up close to its target, no more than 10 or 12 meters away.

Another form of directed energy that travels farther and can penetrate through thicker substances, such as walls and metal barriers, is pulsed microwave energy. The shape

of an electromagnetic pulse that could do the kind of physiological harm seen in AHI cases would show an extremely steep rise, with each pulse reaching peak energy within less than a nanosecond. A U.S. Intelligence Community expert panel tasked with assessing the potential causes of Havana Syndrome concluded that this type of energy could “fracture” membranes and capillaries, damaging the myelin sheaths that encase neurons and the blood-brain barrier.

As Operation *Reduktor* and Terentiev’s research shows, Moscow has been experimenting with both types of directed energy weapons for a long time.

As Operation Reduktor and Terentiev’s research shows, Moscow has been experimenting with both types of directed energy weapons for a long time.

Dr. David A. Relman, a microbiologist at Stanford University and a co-chair of the expert panel assessment, told The Insider that elements of Reduktor as described in the documents “align with what we and others have hypothesized, and thus, are troubling in their implications. As we [stated in the report](#), the kinds of injuries we proposed to be caused by special forms of pulsed microwave energy would not be expected necessarily to show up on brain imaging studies. We assessed that there was technical and practical evidence to support the plausibility of a concealable device that could cause these effects. These documents and their origins would appear to be clearly worth pursuing.”

Once that pursuit begins, there is the potential for it to lead to some very disturbing places. The Kirov Military Medical Academy in St. Petersburg, Russia is headed by the aforementioned GRU consultant Sergei Chepur, a specialist in cholinesterase inhibitors like Novichok.

But it is Chepur’s research work that presents the greatest cause for concern. Judging from his publications, Chepur is not only a specialist in biochemistry, but also in the effects of radiation on the brain. The Kirov Academy he heads is one of the few institutions in Russia that has studied Minor’s syndrome, the extremely rare phenomenon that just happened to befall embassy wife Joy in Tbilisi following her encounter with Albert Averyanov.

Don't Say 'The Russians Are Trying to Hurt Us'

A consensus has formed among the growing community of AHI sufferers that the U.S. government — and the CIA in particular — is hiding the full extent of what it knows about the source of Havana Syndrome. The victims offer two general hypotheses as to why. The first is that releasing the full intelligence around Russian involvement might

be so shocking as to convince the American people and their representatives that Moscow has committed an act of war against the United States, thereby raising thorny questions as to how a nuclear power fond of showing off its hypersonic missiles ought to be made to pay. The second is that acknowledging Havana Syndrome is caused by a foreign adversary could put a damper on recruitment to the CIA and State Department. After all, how many Americans would be willing to serve their country overseas in the full knowledge that their next load of laundry or morning jaunt to the embassy could result in permanent physical and mental ailments?

The State Department has walked a knife-edge in addressing that contingency. *The Insider*, *60 Minutes* and *Der Spiegel* obtained a memo distributed to employees of the Tbilisi mission on December 29, 2021 — over two months after Joy’s attack. It references a task force responsible for coordinating response to AHIs and several pages of guidance on how to talk to children about the strange events, offering distinct advice for different age groups. For young kids who “don’t have enough life experience to understand some of the elements involved in complex, difficult topics like AHI,” the memo advises parents to catch their biases and limit the amount of information their children can access: “Don’t say things like ‘the Russians are trying to hurt or intimidate us’ or ‘if you hear a loud noise, you are probably going to feel dizzy and sick so make sure you get off the X, etc.’”

The implication here is that not only are AHIs real, but U.S. diplomats are all too aware of how they happen and who’s behind them.

Still, it remains unclear why it took American officials so long to acknowledge the problem, and why they still show no sign of having a plan to solve it. “I have spent more than a decade fighting for U.S. government employees and their families — sometimes small children and even pets — who have been victimized by AHIs overseas and domestically,” says attorney Mark Zaid. “It has been so distressing to see how much effort our government has undertaken to cover up the true details of these attacks, no doubt perpetrated by a foreign adversary.”

That adversary may even be boasting of the fact. Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of Russia’s Security Council and a former KGB officer wrote in September 2023 in the in-house magazine for the SVR, Russia’s foreign intelligence service: “In recent years, hundreds of employees of foreign intelligence services, as well as other persons involved in organizing intelligence and subversive activities against our country and our strategic partners, have been identified and neutralized.”

Official attempts to push back against the accusation that Washington has not done enough to combat Havana Syndrome have been short on detail. In a statement to *60 Minutes* regarding this investigation, the ODNI affirmed, “We continue to closely

examine anomalous health incidents (AHIs), particularly in areas we have identified as requiring additional research and analysis.”

However, while recent reports have suggested that Havana Syndrome cases have ceased in recent years, multiple former and present U.S. officials told *60 Minutes* that a senior U.S. Department of Defense official was targeted as recently as July 2023 at the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. That gathering of North American and European representatives, which at various points included U.S. President Joe Biden and his Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, was largely focused on the theme of Western military support for Ukraine in its ongoing defensive war against Russia.

Other reports have noted a proliferation of cases in Vienna in the latter half of 2021, months before the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Two veterans of the CIA’s Kyiv Station were posted to Vienna during that spate of reported attacks.

This is not the first time that U.S. personnel serving overseas have fallen victim to widespread adverse health consequences. In the decades since the Gulf War of 1991-1992, hundreds of thousands of Western and Iraqi veterans reported suffering from a common set of symptoms ranging from fatigue to terminal tumors. As Edgreen, the former DIA investigator, said, “It took 30 years to prove that the Gulf War Syndrome was a result of exposure to low levels of sarin. [Havana Syndrome] will be proven.”

Unlike Gulf War Syndrome, which resulted from a confluence of environmental factors rather than from the deliberate actions of a state, Havana Syndrome shows all the markings of a Russian hybrid warfare operation.

It may be proven. But unlike Gulf War Syndrome, which resulted from a confluence of environmental factors rather than from the deliberate actions of a state actor, Havana Syndrome shows all the markings of a Russian hybrid warfare operation. If it is established that the Kremlin really is behind the attacks, then the provision of healthcare and monetary compensation for the victims will not be enough to solve the problem. Removing this many capable American spies and diplomats from active service without killing them and without your main adversary even admitting they’ve done so — such a sustained, decade-long campaign would easily count as one of Vladimir Putin’s greatest strategic victories against the United States.

With additional reporting by Michael Rey, Oriana Zill de Granados, Kit Ramgopal and Emily Gordon, Kato Kopaleishvili, Giorgi Tsikarishvili, Roman Lehberger, Fidelius Schmid, Steffen Lüdke.

<https://theins.ru/en/politics/270425>