



**EMBASSY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
IN THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA**

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PRESS RELEASE ON SALISBURY INCIDENT

On 9th of April Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov made the remarks at a meeting with Russian diplomats expelled from a number of countries on forged accusations in connection with Britain's Skripal case:

I am happy to see you in good spirits. Your faces are cheerful. I am sure this will be the case in the future, too.

I will not discuss in detail the reasons for the early end to your missions abroad. You know them full well. It has nothing to do with the work you did and the tasks you fulfilled, promoting cooperation and good relations between the Russian Federation and the countries where you served. The expulsion of 150 Russian diplomats from almost 30 countries is an unprecedented provocation that has nothing to do with the task of promoting international cooperation and the implementation of the agreements stemming from the UN Charter and recorded in numerous international documents, including, of course, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

As you know we have certainly given an appropriate response. We will never bow to ultimatums. This is not the language to speak with the Russian Federation. We will always do everything we can to protect the security and dignity of our citizens and the sovereignty and national interests of the Russian Federation in full conformity with international law.

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of your families that are with you through the hardships and uneasy situations that have been part of your work abroad.

As you know, the leadership of the Russian Federation did everything necessary to make your return home as comfortable as possible, doing everything we could in emergency circumstances and observing the deadlines that were categorically set forth by the countries of your stay.

I am sure that your future work will be productive and reliable. We will do everything we can despite the objective situation created by the unforeseen interruption of the missions of so many people to reduce your forced and short vacation and enable you to resume work on the foreign policy fronts of our large homeland.

I would like to wish you all the best, once again.

On the same date Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland replied to a question on alleged interception of messages concerning the Salisbury poisoning by British analysts:

Q: How would you comment on reports in the British media that British analysts intercepted messages that might be connected to the Salisbury poisoning?

A: Media reports that on 3 and 4 March “RAF analysts” in Cyprus intercepted two messages, which included the phrases “the package has been delivered” and that two individuals had “made a successful egress” are unconvincing, as are the attempts to link those messages to the Skripals case. The fact that the intercept was allegedly part of the intelligence shown by Britain to its allies to persuade them to expel Russian diplomats shows yet again that the British position is based on pure assumptions.

The Embassy has already sent an official request the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to confirm or deny this information.

On the same date Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland replied to a question on possible resettlement of Sergey and Yulia Skripal:

Q: How do you assess the recent reports on the possibility of Sergey Skripal and Yulia Skripal to be resettled to the USA, Australia, Canada or New Zealand and offered new identities?

A: This would be another gross violation of international law. Since the poisoning of Sergey and Yulia Skripal the United Kingdom has not complied with its international obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the bilateral Consular Convention by not allowing consular access to the Russian citizens and not providing any verifiable information on their wishes in that respect. The explanation regarding the rejection of Victoria Skripal's visa application, who intended to meet her relatives in Britain, was absurd and farfetched. With a secret resettlement of Mr and Ms Skripal all opportunities to hear their version of the events of 4 March will highly likely be lost forever. The world, while having no opportunity to interact with them, will have every reason to see this as an abduction of the two Russian nationals or at least as their isolation.

On 10th of April Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland replied to a question on destruction of evidence in relation to the Salisbury poisoning:

Q: It has been reported that Mr Skripal's house, "The Mill" pub and "Zizzi" restaurant in Salisbury, will be destroyed. What is your response to that?

A: This confirms that the UK has embraced a policy of destroying important and valuable evidence. We have seen this already with Mr Skripal's animals, the bench where Mr and Ms Skripal were found etc.

Since 4 March, the United Kingdom has been doing everything to prevent us from gaining access to the criminal file. Britain has not provided any information on the ongoing investigation and has constantly been denying Russia access to evidence, such as samples of the nerve agent used in Salisbury. Despite the fact that a criminal case regarding the poisoning of Yulia Skripal has been opened in Russia, our law enforcement agencies are unable to get necessary evidence as their British counterparts refuse to cooperate.

We would like to remind everyone that on 12 March the Prime Minister Theresa May and the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson brought up very serious accusations against Russia. Nearly a month has passed, but these accusations are still not supported by any evidence at all.

We get the impression that the British Government is deliberately trying to destroy all possible evidence, classify all remaining materials and make an independent and transparent investigation impossible. Such policy can only undermine the authority of the country and further damage its image. We demand a proper and public explanation of such position.

On the same date Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland commented on new media reports on the version of Skripal's poisoning:

The Embassy has taken note of British media reports that Russian citizens Sergey and Yulia Skripal were poisoned by a nerve agent in the form of a transparent and odourless gel which it said to have been smeared over the door handle “by Russian agents in broad daylight”. It was also said that “by chance” doctors with specialist chemical weapons training were on duty at the Salisbury hospital when the victims were admitted.

This is yet another example of potentially vital information circulating in the media without the Russian side receiving anything from the British authorities through official channels. The Embassy sent today another Note Verbale with a request to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to confirm or deny the above-mentioned media reports.

On the same date the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland issued the response to Boris Johnson’s article in the Sunday Times:

The Foreign Secretary’s article in the latest Sunday Times has become a useful summary of the accusations put forward by the UK Government against Russia in the context of the 4 March 2018 incident in Salisbury. They are based on a number of claims that, put together, have allowed the UK to declare that it is

“highly likely” that the Russian state is responsible for an attempted assassination of Sergey and Yulia Skripal with the military-grade nerve agent identified as “Novichok”. Let us address Mr Johnson’s claims one by one.

So far, the Russian government and state-owned media have invented 29 separate theories about the Salisbury poisonings.

So far, the British government and mainstream media have not presented either Russia or the wider public with any evidence that would corroborate their official version of who is responsible. In the absence of concrete facts, it is only natural that Russian experts, journalists and members of the public put forward multiple theories of what may have happened.

It is however not true that any of those versions have been put forward by the Russian government. It is not our habit to accuse anybody without facts.

Meanwhile, the British government sources have been constantly leaking various versions of the Salisbury incident to the press. It has been reported that the Skripals were poisoned at a pub, at a restaurant, in their car, at home, at a cemetery, through gifts, through buckwheat porridge, and now through the door handle. There have also been conflicting versions of other elements of the case, such as the fate of Mr Skripal’s animals.

This time, the torrent of absurdity has availed the Kremlin little: 28 countries and NATO delivered their emphatic answer by siding with Britain and evicting more than 150 Russian diplomats, the largest collective expulsion in history.

Congratulations to Britain for spoiling our diplomatic relations with 28 countries, championed by the Foreign Secretary who is keen to stress the need to “engage” with Russia. Yet public statements by a number of officials of the countries concerned make it clear that the decision to expel diplomats was taken precisely on the basis of (the wrongly understood) solidarity rather than facts. Consider this:

- Czech Republic President, Miloš Zeman, said in an interview on 29 March: “So far the UK has not presented any evidence. There are suspicions, but as you

know, suspicions are not evidence. I understand the essence of the solidarity act, but I would like to see proof as well. [...] Listen, what does ‘highly likely’ mean? I would like to have on my desk if not direct, at least indirect evidence”. Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Jakub Dürř has been quoted as saying: “When it comes to the UK position, we completely trust our British partner. You don’t doubt your friend, especially when the argument is supported by a phrase like ‘highly likely’”.

- Bulgaria’s Prime Minister, Boyko Borissov, said at a press conference on 30 March: “We are waiting for more evidence, if any exists, and for the moment we don’t believe we have to expel Russian diplomats”.

- Poland’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Bartosz Cichocki, was quoted by the Sunday Express on 8 April as saying: “In our case, the depth of the UK’s information wasn’t critical because we had been observing patterns of Russian behaviour and what happened in Salisbury fitted into that pattern”.

- Estonia’s Foreign Ministry official Paul Teesalu, also quoted by the Sunday Express, said: “We really didn’t need long to decide to support Britain”.

The British authorities have been constantly trying to twist common sense, first by inviting their allies to act without evidence, and then by portraying that act as a substitute for evidence. Nobody will be fooled by this. In fact, British and US ambassadors have been active across the world to rally other countries to their cause, but were met with firm rejection everywhere except within the EU and NATO.

Our experts at Porton Down have identified the substance used against the Skripals as a “military grade” Novichok, a class of nerve agents developed by Russia.

The identification of the agent as “Novichok” has never been independently verified and is yet to be confirmed by the OPCW.

More importantly, the UK has never made clear what it means by saying “developed by Russia”. Neither Russia nor the Soviet Union have ever developed an agent named “Novichok”. While Soviet scientists did work on new types of chemical poisons, the word “Novichok” was introduced in the West in mid-1990s

to designate a series of new chemical agents developed there on the basis of information made available by Russian expat researchers. The British insistence to use the Russian word “Novichok” is an attempt to artificially link the substance to Russia.

Meanwhile, in a 2007 US-published handbook and a 2008 book by the defector chemist Vil Mirzayanov, detailed information on several dozen “Novichok”-type substances was published. Thereafter, this type of agents was described in numerous publications of US, Czech, Italian, Iranian, Indian researchers who, judging by their works, did actually synthesize them. Given the broad scientific literature, it is safe to say that any modern chemical laboratory is capable of synthesizing “Novichoks”.

For these reasons, speaking of a nerve agent “of a type developed by Russia” is as relevant as speaking of all personal computers as being “of a type developed by the United States”.

In addition, the British government has information that within the last decade Russia has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents likely for assassination and as part of this programme has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks.

All production of chemical weapons in Russia stopped in 1992. The existing stockpiles, the largest in the world, were being destroyed for the following 25 years under strict control of the OPCW, of which the UK is an important member. In September 2017, the OPCW certified the full destruction of Russia’s chemical weapons. If the UK had information of Russia producing military-grade chemical agents in contravention of its obligations, why did it keep silent at the OPCW?

It is also not clear what kind of information Britain possesses and how it has come to the conclusion regarding the purpose of the alleged production. According to a government source quoted by the media, the actual quantities of “Novichoks” allegedly produced in Russia were so small that they could not conceivably be intended for military purposes, and hence the conclusion “likely for assassination”. In this context, it is worth to recall that in his interviews, Porton Down Chief

Executive Gary Aitkenhead did not deny producing “Novichok” at his facility. One wonders whether it is produced there for assassination purposes or on a military scale.

Moreover, Russia has an obvious motive for targeting Sergei Skripal. In the year that Skripal moved to Britain, President Putin made a televised threat that “traitors” would “kick the bucket” and “choke”.

False. What President (then Prime Minister) Putin actually said was a direct denial of policy to assassinate traitors. Consider 2010 TV transcript (translation from Russian):

“Question: [...] According to memoirs, leaders of various countries signed orders to assassinate enemies of the state abroad. [...] Have you, as head of state, taken such decisions?”

Answer: ”...Russian special services do not use such methods. As regards traitors, they will kick the bucket themselves, I assure you. Take the recent case of treason, when a group of our illegals was exposed. You must understand that these are officers. The guy has betrayed his friends, his comrades in arms – these are people who have sacrificed all their lives to their Fatherland. Consider what it takes to learn a foreign language as if it was your mother tongue, to renounce relatives, not to be able to attend funerals of your loved ones. Think about it. You give your whole life to serving your Motherland, and then some animal betrays you. How will he live with it? How will he look into his children’s eyes? Whatever thirty pieces of silver they may have received, they will choke on them, I assure you. To keep hiding for the rest of their lives, not to be able to see their loved ones – you know, whoever chooses such fate will regret about it”.

It is clear to any reader in good faith what Mr Putin meant.

Further, Mr Johnson’s words imply that Mr Skripal was such a threat to Russia so as to be considered an obvious target. This is hard to reconcile with the fact that after having served a part of his sentence, Mr Skripal was pardoned and allowed to leave Russia for the UK where he has been living in peace for 8 years.

The fate of Alexander Litvinenko, murdered in London in 2006, demonstrates the Kremlin's willingness to kill someone in this country.

False. The murder of Alexander Litvinenko demonstrates Whitehall's willingness to classify key information and put forward serious accusations unsupported by facts. The same script, but in a fast-forward mode, is being played this time.

The Russian Duma has actually passed a law that allows the assassination of "extremists" overseas.

False. There is no such law in Russia.

The closest we have is the 2006 law against terrorism that allows the President, with the agreement of the upper chamber of Parliament (a decision to be taken publicly), to send "formations of armed forces" to combat terrorists and their bases abroad. This is essentially the same procedure as the one prescribed by the Constitution for using troops beyond Russia's national territory. As one clearly sees, this has nothing to do with targeted killing. Invoking this law as a "confirmation" of Russia's policy reveals total lack of expertise, but also raises the question whether Mr Skripal has been engaged in any activities that the UK thinks Russia could conceivably consider as terrorist or extremist.

Put the facts together and there is one conclusion: only the Russian state has the means, the motive and the record to carry out this crime.

Apart from being an absolutely artificial construct, this "conclusion" also underscores the complete lack of real evidence pointing at Russia's responsibility.

The next moment will come when the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) releases its analysis of the nerve agent used in Salisbury. In accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, Porton Down provided samples to the OPCW so that its experts could independently verify the analysis.

UK cooperation on this case with the OPCW is a step forward, but its legal basis is doubtful. Instead of using the normal OPCW procedures whereby the UK could have engaged Russia directly or through the OPCW Executive Council, the

UK has chosen to cooperate bilaterally with the OPCW Technical Secretariat under an arrangement the details of which are unknown. In the OPCW, there is no such procedure as “verification of analysis”. It is not clear what the OPCW mandate in this case is. It is also not known whether OPCW standards have been fully adhered to, particularly those related to the “chain of custody” of samples. It was reported earlier that OPCW experts would directly take blood samples from Mr and Ms Skripal, yet now Mr Johnson seems to contradict this. In other words, to cooperate with the OPCW is better than nothing, but to say that it is being done “in accordance with the Convention” is an exaggeration, and overall this process lacks transparency.

Like the Porton Down scientists, the OPCW’s job is to identify what substance was used, not who attempted the assassination.

Thank you very much for letting everybody know in advance.

Yet the Russian state has already begun a pre-emptive campaign to discredit the OPCW’s verdict. Last week, Russia asked to join the investigation, which is rather like a suspected drunk driver demanding the right to use his own breathalyser.

His own or not, but a suspected drunk driver is fully entitled to make sure that the breathalyser is of proper quality and in good condition and that it is not being tampered with. And of course, the question is, how does Russia’s request to join the investigation discredit the OPCW? Rather, British refusal does.

The OPCW Executive Council resoundingly defeated this ploy, with only 6 out of 41 countries siding with Russia.

This sounds as if 35 countries sided with Britain, which is false. In fact, the 15 countries that supported Britain were all either UK’s or US’ military allies. The rest of the world either supported the Russian proposal or abstained, despite unprecedented pressure from London and Washington.

This raises an obvious question: will the Kremlin accept the finding of the OPCW when it comes? Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, gave an answer which I will paraphrase as a flat no – unless, of course, the Kremlin was

allowed to breathalyse itself. Russia “cannot support in advance the results of an investigation it is not part of”, he declared, rather as a drunk driver might insist on the right to join the police investigation into himself.

To start with, Mr Lavrov does not need help in paraphrasing him.

Secondly, this is a perfect illustration of the logical trick the UK is trying to play. Who once was a “suspected drunk driver”, suddenly becomes just a “drunk driver”, precisely because he was not allowed to check the functionality of the breathalyser.

In our case, the (quite arrogantly) self-styled traffic policeman, instead of a standard breathalyser, has tried to use one of his own making (the Porton Down one), and has still refused to allow the public to see by themselves what the breathalyser actually indicated. As nobody believed, he brought a second breathalyser (the non-transparent UK-OPCW process), of a new make, never tested and thus with an unknown margin of error. Isn't it only natural for the driver to ask questions?

On the same date Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland replied to a question on Yulia Skripal's discharge from the hospital:

Q: How do you assess the recent reports that Yulia Skripal has been discharged from the hospital?

A: We are genuinely happy for Yulia and wish her a further recovery and rehabilitation. The Embassy wants to pay tribute to the British medical staff for the care provided to the Russian national.

At the same time, media reports that Yulia has left hospital for a “secure location” cause concern as they mean that British authorities are continuing their policy of isolating her from the public, concealing important evidence and blocking an impartial and independent investigation. We are convinced that details of the incident that Yulia could share would become a valuable contribution to the progress of the investigation.

Meanwhile, British authorities continue to refuse to provide any independently verifiable information about Yulia's health and wishes. The Embassy doesn't know anything about her condition, whether she speaks for herself or whether British authorities speak instead of her, abusing her rights. We confirm our request and intention to meet her and see by ourselves if she is well. And at the very least, we demand an urgent proof that all actions in relation to Yulia are being taken in strict observance of her free will.

The Embassy has sent another Note Verbale to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that demands a meeting between Yulia and the Embassy's consular staff in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the bilateral Consular Convention, which the British authorities continue to violate.

On the same date Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland replied to a question on medical treatment that Sergei and Yulia Skripal are receiving in the Salisbury hospital:

Q: According to the statement of the Medical Director at the Salisbury District Hospital Dr Christine Blanshard, Sergei and Yulia Skripal, and Sgt Nick Bailey, have been exposed to a nerve agent. How does this correlate with the letter of one of the doctors of this Hospital Stephen Davies sent on 16th March to "The Times", where he wrote that "no patients have experienced symptoms of nerve agent poisoning in Salisbury and there have only ever been three patients with significant poisoning"?

A: Careful analysis of Stephen Davies's letter and the statements by Dr Christine Blanshard of 29 March, 6 and 10 April shows that the Salisbury Hospital has never confirmed that Sergei and Yulia Skripal had any symptoms of chemical poisoning and that they were treated precisely for this. Notably, today Dr Blanshard has abstractly enumerated the general symptoms of such poisoning and explained how they are usually treated. At the same time, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to assure us that Sergei and Yulia Skripal are receiving high-quality medical care, again without details.

In this regard, today the Embassy has sent another Note Verbale to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and a letter to Dr Blanshard with a request to clarify this fundamental issue.

Furthermore, it remains unclear if either Sergei or Yulia Skripal agreed on a particular treatment or not. If not, who gave agreement on their behalf? What was their exact diagnosis and how the decision on the treatment was taken? What was this treatment?

This is only a short list of questions that the British side has failed to answer.

On the same date Press Officer of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland commented on interaction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the investigation of the Salisbury incident

More than a month has passed since the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal and almost a month since the Prime Minister Theresa May accused Russia of this crime.

It is widely known that since then numerous versions of the incident have appeared in the media: that the Skripals were allegedly poisoned at a restaurant, in the car, through buckwheat and now through the door handle.

To our legitimate requests to confirm which version of the many circulating in the media is the official one, today we have received a reply stating that the FCO respects the freedom of the press, does not interfere with what the media does and does not publish and will not be commenting on media coverage of an “on-going investigation”. So, it turns out that an “on-going investigation” is not an obstacle for British authorities to accuse someone of a serious crime, but to inform the Embassy of the course of that investigation is somehow impossible. Moreover, this does not prevent them from carefully counting all versions mentioned by the guests of Russian talk shows, presenting them as official ones and accusing Russia of trying to obfuscate the facts.

As for the references to the freedom of the British media, we know what they are worth after the “Sunday Times” reported that the National Security

Council staff “had seized control” over the media response of the Salisbury incident.

All of this is yet another evidence of double standards practiced by the British government that destroy people’s lives and the basics of interstate relations for the sake of narrow domestic political interests. We urge British authorities to act in a transparent way while it is still possible to try fixing the damage they have caused to the international image of their country.