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IN THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA**

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On 13th of April the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland issued the report on the Salisbury Incident:

**SALISBURY:
A CLASSIFIED CASE**

Introduction

On 4 March 2018, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were reportedly poisoned with a nerve agent in Salisbury, Wiltshire. The UK government accused the Russian state of being responsible for the poisoning. Russia denied any involvement. The incident caused major international repercussions, bringing Russia-UK and Russia-West relations to a new low. Yet details of what happened remain unclear.

This paper seeks to summarize the sequence of events as well as to present crucial elements of Britain's and Russia's position.

I. Background: the Skripal family

For the reader's convenience, it is useful to begin with some background information on the individuals involved.

Sergei Viktorovich Skripal, 66 years, was born in Kiev and grew up in the Kaliningrad Region. He completed his education at the Zhdanov Military Engineering School in Kaliningrad and the Moscow Military Engineering Academy.

Sergei Skripal was a career officer at the Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU), the intelligence branch of the Soviet Defence Ministry. For some time, he was the director of the GRU Department of Personnel.

In 1995 Sergei Skripal was recruited by the Secret Intelligence Service of the United Kingdom (MI6). In 2004 he was arrested, and in 2006 convicted for espionage by the Moscow Regional Military Court under Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code (high treason in the form of espionage). Sergei Skripal was sentenced to 13 years in a high-security detention facility and was stripped of his military rank (colonel) and decorations.

On 9 July 2010 Sergei Skripal was pardoned by the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev and was freed along with the three other imprisoned for espionage in the framework of a swap for the ten Russian citizens arrested in the United States.

After being pardoned, Mr Skripal moved to the United Kingdom and has resided in Salisbury, Wiltshire, while retaining his Russian citizenship. According to UK authorities, he has also obtained British citizenship.

Yulia Sergeevna Skripal, 33 years, is a daughter of Sergei Skripal. She lives in Moscow. In 2008 Yulia Skripal graduated from the Moscow State Humanities University.

In 2010 she moved to the United Kingdom with her father, but returned to Moscow five years later. She came to Salisbury to visit her father occasionally.

Sergei and Yulia Skripal's living relatives include:

- Elena Yakovlevna Skripal, 89 years, Sergei's mother and Yulia's grandmother, and

- Viktoria Valerievna Skripal, 45 years, daughter of Sergei's deceased brother Valery and thus Sergei's niece, Yulia's cousin and Elena's granddaughter.

Elena and Viktoria reside together in Yaroslavl, a regional capital 250 km north-east of Moscow.

Media reports have mentioned more distant relatives living in "Siberia". There is no detailed information about them or their interest in the case under consideration.

II. The 4 March incident and initial reaction

On 5 March at 11:09 the Salisbury District Hospital announced on Twitter: “[We are] currently dealing with a major incident involving a small number of casualties, with a multi-agency response”.

At 13:02 Wiltshire Police declared “a major incident after it is suspected that two people have been exposed to an unknown substance in Salisbury”. According to the Police, they had received a call at approx. 16:15 on 4 March “regarding concern for the welfare of a man and a woman” in The Maltings shopping centre in Salisbury. They added: “Both are currently in a critical condition. At this stage it is not yet clear if a crime has been committed [...] We do not believe there is any risk to the wider public”.

Towards the evening, the Police said that the two victims were “a man aged in his 60s and a woman aged in her 30s”. “The pair, who we believe are known to each other, did not have any visible injuries”. Several streets in central Salisbury, the Zizzi restaurant and the Bishop’s Mill pub were cordoned off.

The same evening, BBC reported that the male victim was Sergei Skripal. It was later reported that the female victim was his daughter Yulia.

On 6 March the investigation was transferred to the National Counter Terrorism Policing Network, yet no terrorist incident was declared. The Police also announced that “a small number of emergency services personnel, including some police officers and staff, were assessed immediately after the incident”.

The same day, the Russian Embassy in London sent a note verbale to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, inviting an official comment from the government on the incident with Mr and Ms Skripal, any information on their condition and the circumstances that led them to being hospitalised. The Embassy also invited British authorities “to ensure maximum transparency of the investigation as a necessary condition of public trust in its outcomes”. The Embassy informed the FCO of the request it had received from Viktoria Skripal to provide information on the condition of her relatives.

Later that day, UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, while responding to an urgent question in the House of Commons, said: “Hon. Members will note the echoes of the death of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006. Although it would be wrong to prejudge the investigation, I can reassure the House that, should evidence emerge that implies state responsibility, Her Majesty’s Government will respond appropriately and robustly [...] I say to governments around the world that no attempt to take innocent life on UK soil will go either unsanctioned or unpunished”. In a note verbale, the FCO advised the Russian Embassy that Mr Johnson’s statement sets out the government position sought in the Russian note.

The same day, Russian President’s Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia has no information on what had happened or possible causes of the “tragic situation”. He added that Russia had received no requests but was always open to cooperation.

On 7 March Metropolitan Police said: “Police are now in a position to confirm that their symptoms are a result of exposure to a nerve agent. Scientific tests by Government experts have identified the specific nerve agent used which will help identify the source but at this stage in a fast-paced investigation we will not comment further”. Judging by the Police requests to the public, the initial investigation focused on the Zizzi restaurant and the Bishop’s Mill pub as the potential places of poisoning.

On 8 March UK Home Secretary Amber Rudd gave a statement on the investigation into the Salisbury incident. She said that the victims “are understood to be Sergei and Yulia Skripal”. “Both remain unconscious, and in a critical but stable condition”. She also announced that a police officer (later identified as Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey) “has also fallen seriously ill [...] his condition remains serious but stable, and he is conscious, talking and engaging”. She added that “samples from the victims have been tested by experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. [...] Forensic analysis has revealed the presence of a nerve agent, and the incident is therefore being treated as attempted murder. [...] I will not comment further on the nature of the nerve

agent”. She also spoke against “the speculation around who was responsible” as the police should be allowed to carry on their investigation.

On 9 March Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: “If anyone is interested in Russia’s assistance in any investigation [...] we will be prepared to consider such possibility, if we have the respective data. But to achieve that, you have to make contact in a professional manner through existing channels, rather than run to TV with baseless accusations”.

On 11 March the Foreign Office informed the Russian Embassy that “Yulia Skripal remains in a critical, but stable condition in intensive care after being exposed to a nerve agent. As Sergei Skripal is a British citizen we are unable to provide information on his condition to the Embassy”.

On 12 March the Russian Ambassador, Alexander Yakovenko, was summoned by Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. The Foreign Secretary said that the nerve agent used against Mr and Ms Skripal had been identified as “A-234” and that, according to the UK assessment, it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for the attack. He invited Russia to respond, before the end of the next day, whether this was a direct act by the Russian State or acknowledge that the Russian government had lost control of this nerve agent. He also demanded Russia to provide full and complete disclosure of its chemical weapons programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Later that day Prime Minister Theresa May made a statement in Parliament. She said: “It is now clear that Mr Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia. It is part of a group of nerve agents known as Novichok. Based on the positive identification of this chemical agent by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, our knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent and would still be capable of doing so, Russia’s record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations and our assessment that Russia views some defectors as legitimate targets for assassinations, the Government have concluded that it is highly likely that Russia was responsible for the act against Sergei and

Yulia Skripal. There are, therefore, only two plausible explanations for what happened in Salisbury on 4 March: either this was a direct act by the Russian state against our country; or the Russian Government lost control of their potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others. [...] This action has happened against a backdrop of a well-established pattern of Russian state aggression". She added: "Should there be no credible response, we will conclude that this action amounts to an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the United Kingdom, and I will come back to this House to set out the full range of measures that we will take in response".

On 13 March the Russian Embassy responded by a note verbale which said that "the Russian Federation was not involved in any way in the incident that took place in Salisbury on 4 March". The Embassy added: "Given that the Foreign Secretary put forth quite serious accusations against Russia, the Embassy demands that samples of the chemical substance to which the British investigation is referring be provided to Russian experts for analysis within the framework of a joint investigation. Without that, all allegations by the British side are pointless. The Russian side also demands full information on the conduct of the investigation, given that one of the victims is a Russian national. [...] In general, an impression is growing that the British Side is unwilling to cooperate with the Russian Side in investigating the crime. In case the British Side does not fulfil the above demands, the Russian Side will assume that the Salisbury incident is a blatant provocation by the British authorities aimed at discrediting Russia".

The same day, Foreign Minister Lavrov said that rather than issuing a 24-hours ultimatum, the UK could have engaged Russia under the procedure of Article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) which foresees a reply to be given within 10 days: "I assure you, if the Convention procedures are fulfilled, the Russian Federation will comply with its obligations and will reply to the request so made in the time prescribed". He added that under those procedures, the requested party has the right to access to the substance in question in order to be able to

analyze it. He stressed that Russia had immediately requested that possibility but that the UK had rejected the request.

On 14 March Ambassador Yakovenko was again summoned to the FCO. Director General for Consular and Security affairs Philip Barton handed over a note verbale and a list of 23 staff members of the Russian Embassy declared “persona non grata” by the British side, who were to leave the country by 21 March, and informed of the decision to reduce the Embassy’s military section to a single military attaché. He also pointed out that additional measures would be set out by the Prime Minister the same day.

In her statement to Parliament the Prime Minister said: “The Russian Government have provided no credible explanation that could suggest that they lost control of their nerve agent, no explanation as to how this agent came to be used in the United Kingdom, and no explanation as to why Russia has an undeclared chemical weapons programme in contravention of international law. Instead it has treated the use of a military-grade nerve agent in Europe with sarcasm, contempt and defiance.

There is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian state was culpable for the attempted murder of Mr Skripal and his daughter, and for threatening the lives of other British citizens in Salisbury, including Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey. This represents an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the United Kingdom”.

The following measures in response were announced by Mrs May:

- to expel 23 Russian diplomats “identified as undeclared intelligence officers”;
- to suspend all planned high-level contacts between the UK and Russia;
- to propose new legislative powers to harden defences against hostile state activity;
- to consider whether there is a need for new counter-espionage powers;
- to table an amendment to the Sanctions Bill to strengthen powers to impose sanctions in response to the violation of human rights;

- to make full use of existing powers to enhance efforts to monitor and track the intentions of those travelling to the UK;
- to freeze Russian State assets in case they may be used to threaten the life or property of UK nationals or residents;
- to deploy a range of tools from across the full breadth of the National Security apparatus in order to counter the threats of hostile state activity.

The same day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation issued a statement saying: “The March 14 statement made by British Prime Minister Theresa May in Parliament on measures to “punish” Russia, under the false pretext of its alleged involvement in the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter, constitutes an unprecedented, flagrant provocation that undermines the foundations of normal dialogue between our countries. We believe it is absolutely unacceptable and unworthy of the British Government to seek to further seriously aggravate relations in pursuit of its unseemly political ends, having announced a whole series of hostile measures, including the expulsion of 23 Russian diplomats from the country. Instead of completing its own investigation and using established international formats and instruments, including within the framework of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – in which we were prepared to cooperate – the British Government opted for confrontation with Russia. Obviously, by investigating this incident in a unilateral, non-transparent way, the British Government is again seeking to launch a groundless anti-Russian campaign. Needless to say, our response measures will not be long in coming.”

Again on 14 March, Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed that “Moscow has informed London through diplomatic channels that Russia was not involved in the Salisbury poisoning”. He added: “Moscow does not accept baseless accusations unsupported by any evidence, nor do we accept the language of ultimatums. We remain open for cooperation in investigating this crime, but unfortunately we do not see any mutual readiness of the British”.

Still on 14 March, at a UN Security Council briefing on the Salisbury incident, UK Chargé d’Affairs Jonathan Allen qualified the event as “an unlawful

use of force – a violation of article two of the United Nations charter”. Russia replied by saying that the issue by no means falls within the mandate of the Security Council and that all discussions are pointless until the OPCW gives its assessment of the Salisbury incident.

On 16 March Foreign Minister Lavrov said: “Russia not only can, but does more [on the Salisbury incident] than anyone, including the UK. [...] We are awaiting an official request from the UK to launch CWC procedures. [...] The fact that they are categorically refusing to send a formal request [...] means that they realize that they have no formal ground to go along the legal path”. He said that if the UK doesn’t want to work in the CWC framework, it can also trigger application of the European Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. “But the gist of the British rhetoric is that they are not obliged to prove anything to anyone”. Meanwhile, Russia, even hypothetically, would have no motive to commit such attacks on the eve of the presidential election and the FIFA World Cup. Yet the British government could have a motive to stage a provocation against Russia due to the difficult situation with Brexit and the desire to keep leading positions internationally. He added that, according to Western-published scientific papers, work on the substance that the UK calls “Novichok” is going on in the USA, the UK, the Czech Republic, Sweden.

On 17 March UK Ambassador UK to Russia Laurie Bristow was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, where he was handed a note stating that in response to the provocative actions of the British side and groundless accusations against the Russian Federation with regard to the incident in Salisbury the Russian side had taken the following decisions in response:

- 23 diplomatic staff of the UK Embassy in Moscow are declared “*persona non grata*” and are to leave Russia within a week.

- Taking into account the disparity in the number of the two countries’ consular missions, the Russian Federation recalls its agreement on the opening and operation of the Consulate General of the United Kingdom in St Petersburg.

Respective procedures will be followed in accordance with international legal practice.

- Due to the unregulated status of the British Council in the Russian Federation, its activities are terminated.

- The British side is warned that in case of further unfriendly actions against Russia, the Russian side reserves the right to take further retaliatory measures.

III. Reaction of UK's partners

On 15 March the leaders of France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement sharing the British assessment that it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for the attack and that there is no plausible alternative explanation.

In the period between 12 and 28 March Theresa May made telephone calls with the US President Donald Trump (twice), German Chancellor Angela Merkel (twice), French President Emmanuel Macron (twice), Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to discuss the Salisbury incident.

On 19 March the EU Foreign Affairs Council made a statement condemning the attack against Sergei and Yulia Skripal and expressing its unqualified solidarity with the UK and its support, including for the UK's efforts to bring those responsible for this crime to justice.

On 22 March the European Council published its conclusions on the Salisbury incident agreeing with the United Kingdom government's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible and that there is no plausible alternative explanation.

As a result, in total 150 staff members of Russian diplomatic missions in 28 countries and the Mission to NATO have been expelled. Those countries are: Albania (2 diplomats expelled), Australia (2), Belgium (1), Canada (4), Croatia (1), Czech Republic (3), Denmark (2), Estonia (1), Finland (1), France (4), Germany

(4), Georgia (1), Hungary (1), Ireland (1), Italy (2), Latvia (1), Lithuania (3), Macedonia (1), Moldova (3), Montenegro (1), Netherlands (2), Norway (1), Poland (4), Romania (1), Spain (2), Sweden (1), Ukraine (13), United States (60), as well as NATO (10). Six EU countries did not expel diplomats but recalled their ambassadors to Russia for consultations.

Comments made by high officials of the countries concerned include the following:

- 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: “Bulgaria has shown full solidarity with the United Kingdom by voting at the European Council [...] 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”.

On 26 March the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed strong protest in the wake of the decision taken by a number of EU and NATO member countries to expel Russian diplomats. This step was regarded as an unfriendly one that is not consistent with the goals and interests of establishing the underlying reasons and searching for the perpetrators of the incident that occurred in the town of Salisbury on 4 March. Russia reciprocated by a symmetrical expulsion of diplomats of the countries concerned.

On 30 March Ambassador Bristow was again summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry, where he was handed a note of protest against the provocative and unfounded actions by the British side, which had orchestrated a groundless expulsion of Russian diplomats from a number of countries. The ambassador was informed that within a month, the British side must bring the total number of employees of UK missions in Russia to the same size as that of Russian missions in the UK.

IV. Further political and diplomatic exchanges

On 19 March Russian President Vladimir Putin said: “I guess, any reasonable person realised that this is complete absurd and nonsense. For anybody in Russia to allow themselves such actions on the eve of the presidential election and the football World Cup? This is unthinkable”. He added: “We are ready to cooperate. We said it at the very beginning. We are ready to participate in the necessary investigations, but this requires an interest from the other side, and that’s what we don’t see at this stage”.

On 26 March Theresa May once again spoke about “a pattern of increasingly aggressive Russian behaviour attacking the international rules based system across our continent and beyond” and called Russia “a threat for the collective security of the UK and its allies”.

On 27 March Boris Johnson wrote in The Times that British allies expelled Russian officials because they shared the UK’s view of the threat posed by the Kremlin to their values and security.

In his Mansion House speech on 28 March, Boris Johnson praised the countries that had joined the UK in expelling Russian diplomats and referred to this as a sign of continued global engagement of Britain despite fears associated with Brexit.

On 28 March the Russian Embassy asked the Foreign Office to assist in arranging meetings with representatives of the Salisbury District Hospital, Metropolitan Police, Porton Down laboratory and the Official Solicitor. No reply has been received.

On 30 and 31 March the Russian Embassy sent notes verbales to the Foreign Office outlining 41 questions on the Skripal case that had been officially asked but remained unanswered. Most of these remain unanswered to this day.

On 3 April President Putin said: “Of course, we are interested in a full-fledged investigation. We want access to that investigation and hope to receive the respective materials, as we are speaking of Russian citizens”.

On 5 April Russia convened a UN Security Council meeting to resume discussion of the Salisbury incident. Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya pointed out numerous questions left unanswered by the UK Government.

On 6 April Ambassador Yakovenko addressed a personal letter to Foreign Secretary Johnson expressing dissatisfaction with the level of cooperation of the British side and proposing to hold a meeting to thoroughly discuss the situation regarding the Salisbury incident and the general state of Russia-UK relations. No reply has been received.

V. Medical issues

On 22 March Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey was discharged from hospital.

On 29 March Dr Christine Blanshard, Medical Director for Salisbury District Hospital, said: “I’m pleased to be able to report an improvement in the condition of Yulia Skripal. She has responded well to treatment but continues to receive expert clinical care 24 hours a day”. The Hospital said Ms Skripal is no longer in a critical condition. Media reported that she had regained consciousness and was able to eat and talk.

On 5 April in a telephone conversation with Viktoria Skripal aired on Russian TV, Yulia Skripal said: “Everything is fine, everything is solvable, everybody is recovering, everybody is alive, [Sergei Skripal] is fine, he is currently sleeping”. The same day, Metropolitan Police published a statement on behalf of Ms Skripal in which she said: “I woke up over a week ago now and am glad to say my strength is growing daily”.

On 6 April the Hospital announced that Sergei Skripal had been “responding well to treatment, improving rapidly and is no longer in a critical condition”.

On 10 April Dr Blanshard announced Yulia Skripal's discharge from hospital. She said: "While I won't go into great detail about the treatment we've been providing, I will say that nerve agents work by attaching themselves to a particular enzyme in the body which then stops the nerves from working properly. This results in symptoms such as sickness, hallucinations and confusion. Our job in treating the patients has been to stabilise them – ensuring that the patients could breathe and that blood could continue to circulate. We then needed to use a variety of different drugs to support the patients until they could create more enzymes to replace those affected by the poisoning. We also used specialised decontamination techniques to remove any residual toxins. Both patients have responded exceptionally well to the treatment we've been providing. But equally, both patients are at different stages in their recovery. Yulia has now been discharged from Salisbury District Hospital [...] Her father has also made good progress. On Friday I announced that he was no longer in a critical condition. Although he is recovering more slowly than Yulia, we hope that he too will be able to leave hospital in due course".

On 11 April a statement was published by Metropolitan Police on behalf of Ms Skripal, saying: "I have left my father in [the hospital's] care, and he is still seriously ill. I too am still suffering with the effects of the nerve agent used against me". The Russian Embassy questioned the authenticity of the statement, pointing, among other things, at the inconsistency between the phone conversation in which Yulia says to Viktoria that "everything is fine" with her and her father, and their health condition as described in the Metropolitan Police statement.

VI. Police investigation

On 17 March Metropolitan Police made public the following sequence of Mr and Ms Skripal's movements prior to the incident:

"14.40hrs on Saturday, 3 March: Yulia arrives at Heathrow Airport on a flight from Russia.

09.15hrs on Sunday, 4 March: Sergei's car is seen in the area of London Road, Churchill Way North and Wilton Road.

13.30hrs: Sergei's car is seen being driven down Devizes Road, towards the town centre.

13:40hrs: Sergei and Yulia arrive in Sainsbury's upper level car park at the Maltings. At some time after this, they go to the Bishops Mill Pub in the town centre.

14.20hrs: They dine at Zizzi Restaurant.

15:35hrs: They leave Zizzi Restaurant.

16.15hrs: Emergency services receive a report from a member of the public and police arrive at the scene within minutes, where they find Sergei and Yulia extremely ill on a park bench near the restaurant”.

Since then, few details of the investigation have been announced officially, although quite a few of them have been reported by the media quoting “sources”.

Several versions have been explored by the media as to how exactly the victims were exposed to the poison. These include:

- The Skripals could be poisoned by food or drink at the Zizzi restaurant or at the Bishop’s Mill pub that they visited on 4 March 2018 (The Sun, 6 March, based on the fact that the two establishments were cordoned off).

- The Skripals could be sprayed with poison by attackers in the street (Daily Mail, 6 March, source: “Anti-terror police”).

- The nerve agent could be planted in one of the personal items in Yulia Skripal’s suitcase before she left Moscow for London. According to this theory the toxin was impregnated in an item of clothing or cosmetics or else in a gift that was opened in the house of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, meaning Yulia Skripal was deliberately targeted to get at her father (The Telegraph, 15 March, source: “Senior sources in the intelligence agencies”).

- The nerve agent could be planted in the air conditioner of the car of Skripals (Daily Mail, 19 March, source: “Security expert Philip Ingram”).

- The Skripals could be poisoned through buckwheat that Yulia Skripal had asked her friend to buy and bring for her father, because she had forgotten to pick up the grocery gifts herself (The Sun, 1 April, source: “British investigators”).

On 28 March the Police announced that “at this point in our investigation, we believe the Skripals first came into contact with the nerve agent from their front door”.

At the time of writing, the door handle version looks the primary one. It has been reported that the nerve agent, being a gel, could be smeared on the door handle so that Mr Skripal would be poisoned once he touched it. It then allegedly slowly penetrated his skin and Yulia’s and caused its effects several hours after exposure.

It has also been reported that Mr and Ms Skripal’s mobile phones were switched off for four hours in the morning of 4 March.

It has been officially confirmed that pet animals of Mr Skripal are dead. They allegedly remained in Mr Skripal’s sealed house after the investigation began. Two guinea pigs allegedly died of starvation, while a cat was found in stressed condition and had to be euthanized. They were allegedly brought to the Porton Down laboratory and incinerated. It is unclear whether they had been tested for nerve agents. According to Viktoria Skripal, Sergei Skripal had two cats; the fate of the second cat is unknown. The death of the animals has been criticised by Russia as an example of cruelty, disregard for Mr Skripal’s rights and destruction of potentially important evidence.

On 31 March Russia formally proposed a joint investigation into the Salisbury incident.

On 3 April a formal request for legal assistance was sent to the Home Office from the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Russian Federation pursuant to a criminal investigation opened in Russia with regard to the attempted murder.

VII. OPCW

On 8 March the UK notified the OPCW Technical Secretariat of the incident in Salisbury. On 12 March Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson spoke to OPCW Director General Ahmet Uzumcu. According to UK authorities, the Technical Secretariat offered its assistance.

As mentioned above, on 13 March Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov suggested that the UK should engage Russia within the framework of the procedures of Article IX CWC.

On 14 March, speaking at the OPCW Executive Council, UK Permanent Representative Peter Wilson said that the Salisbury attack represents a violation by Russia of the fundamental prohibition on the use of chemical weapons contained in Article 1 of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Reacting to the Russian proposal for the UK to use the procedure of Article IX CWC, Mr

Wilson said that “Article IX does not oblige states which are victims of chemical weapons to refrain from seeking rapid response to their immediate and urgent concerns”. The same day, at the UN Security Council, UK representative Jonathan Allen said that the summoning of the Russian Ambassador by the Foreign Secretary constituted the Article IX procedure.

On 14 March Prime Minister Theresa May sent a letter to Director-General of the OPCW Technical Secretariat Ahmet Uzumcu inviting the OPCW Technical Secretariat “to independently verify the analysis” of the British investigation into the Salisbury incident.

On 19 March the group of the OPCW experts reportedly arrived to the UK. On 22 March the Court of Protection authorized taking of biomedical samples from Mr and Ms Skripal for OPCW analysis.

On 21 March a briefing of high officials of the Russian Foreign, Defence and Industry Ministries was held in Moscow, with an aide-memoire circulated. The document reiterated Russia’s readiness to work under Article IX CWC. With regard to the bilateral UK-OPCW process, it was said that “Russia expects the OPCW to make an official detailed account of developments around the ‘Skripal case’. We proceed from the understanding that the OPCW Technical Secretariat shall conduct a full-fledged independent investigation in accordance with all relevant provisions of the CWC”. A number of technical questions were simultaneously addressed to the UK.

On 3 April President of Russia Vladimir Putin said that, according to international experts, about twenty countries in the world can manufacture substances in question. He confirmed the interest in a full-scale investigation, which Russia would like to have access to, and expressed hope to receive the relevant materials, because Russian citizens are involved.

On 3 April Chief executive of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) at Porton Down Gary Aitkenhead stated that his laboratory had identified the substance as a “military-grade nerve agent but has not been able to identify its origin”. On 4 April 2018 the Foreign Office deleted a tweet from 22 March 2018 about “the Russian origin” of this substance. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson was criticized for claiming in an earlier interview that Porton Down had assured him of the Russian origin of the nerve agent.

On 4 April at the request of Russia an Emergency session of the OPCW Executive Council was conducted. A draft decision sponsored by Russia, China and Iran suggested a joint investigation of the incident. The decision was supported by 6 votes, with 15 members voting against and 17 abstentions. Almost all the 15 members voting against the decision were US and UK’s military allies.

At the time of writing, the OPCW intended to publish the summary of its conclusions following the analysis of Salisbury samples on 12 April.

VIII. Consular aspects

In a note verbale of 14 March, the Russian Embassy demanded consular access to Sergei and Yulia Skripal. The Embassy based its demand on the respective provisions of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the USSR-UK Consular Convention. Notably, Article 36, paragraph 1 (a) of the bilateral Convention stipulates that “a consular officer shall be entitled [...] to communicate with, interview and advise a national of the sending State and may render him any assistance including, where necessary, arranging for aid and advice in legal matters”.

On 15 March the Foreign Office responded by saying that consular access to Yulia Skripal “is based on a number of considerations, including the risk to her

health and the risk to others as a result of her condition, as well as the risks of contamination”. Consular access to Sergei Skripal and information on his condition was again denied citing his British citizenship.

On 16 March the Russian Embassy qualified the decision of the British side not granting consular access as a violation of the consular conventions. The Embassy further requested immediate full medical report and up to date visual materials “as clear evidence that this Russian citizen is safe and is well treated”.

On 20 March Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson wrote in an article: “Sergei and Yulia Skripal have been in a coma since 4 March [...] They cannot give their consent to be photographed or receive visitors [...] It is not obvious that the Skripals, of all patients, would welcome a visit from Russian officials”.

On 22 March in a new note verbale, the Russian Embassy put a number of detailed questions on the medical condition of Mr and Ms Skripal, their treatment, and the reasons precluding consular access.

The same day, a judgment of the Court of Protection was published authorizing taking biomedical samples from Mr and Ms Skripal in the interests of the OPCW expert team. According to the judgment, a “litigation friend” had been appointed by UK authorities to act on behalf of Mr and Ms Skripal. The lawyer representing the litigation friend did not ask the Court to ensure consular notification of the proceedings and did not inform the Court of the interest in the case expressed by Viktoria Skripal. The Foreign Office informed the Russian Embassy of the appointment of the litigation friend on the same day, i.e. after the proceedings were over. On 28 March the Embassy expressed its protest over that inaction.

On 23 March the Foreign Office reiterated that access to Yulia Skripal “is necessarily limited because of her condition”.

On 29 March after it was announced that Yulia Skripal is no longer in a critical condition, the Foreign Office informed the Embassy that they would “notify Ms Skripal of your request for consular access and [...] ascertain her wishes in that regard”.

On 2 April the Russian Embassy requested the Foreign Office to provide assistance in allowing Viktoria Skripal to visit her uncle and cousin in Salisbury. The next day, the Embassy formally requested the UK Embassy in Moscow to issue a visa to Viktoria Skripal. On 4 April the Embassy asked the Foreign Office to designate a contact person who would coordinate practical issues during Viktoria Skripal's visit. In a further note verbale of 6 April, the Embassy confirmed its availability to offer Viktoria Skripal every assistance, should she need any, during her visit.

On 5 April Russian TV aired the recording of a telephone conversation between Yulia and Viktoria Skripal where they discussed the possibility of Viktoria's visit. The same evening, Metropolitan Police issued a statement on behalf of Yulia Skripal, saying "I am sure you appreciate that the entire episode is somewhat disorientating, and I hope that you'll respect my privacy and that of my family during the period of my convalescence".

On 6 April it became known that Viktoria Skripal was denied a visa, officially for not complying with UK immigration rules. At the same time, media quoted a "government source" according to which the visa was denied because "it appears that the Russian state is trying to use Viktoria as a pawn". In a note verbale, the Russian Embassy qualified this as a decision taken out of purely political considerations. The Embassy concluded that Mr and Ms Skripal, both reported as recovering, remain hidden from the public, media and consular officials, while the only relative who could reasonable expect to see them is kept out of the UK.

On 5 April the Foreign Office informed the Embassy that "The United Kingdom has complied fully with its international obligations in relation to the requests [...] for consular access [...] The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has, upon Ms Skripal regaining consciousness, conveyed to her the Embassy's offer of consular assistance. Ms Skripal is now able to decide if and when she wishes to accept such assistance". The Foreign Office also invited the Embassy to designate

a consular officer as the contact point for Ms Skripal. The Embassy did so on the same day.

In further correspondence, the Russian Embassy again reiterated its disagreement with the statements on UK's compliance with the consular conventions, and demanded verifiable information on Mr and Ms Skripal's whereabouts, condition and wishes, including with regard to consular access.

On 11 April a statement was published by Metropolitan Police on behalf of Ms Skripal, saying: "I have access to friends and family, and I have been made aware of my specific contacts at the Russian Embassy who have kindly offered me their assistance in any way they can. At the moment I do not wish to avail myself of their services". The Russian Embassy questioned whether the statement actually belongs to Yulia, pointing at a number of inconsistencies, and demanded urgent proof that everything that is being done to Ms Skripal is done according to her free will.

IX. Summary of the official position of the British Government

The United Kingdom holds Russia responsible for the incident in Salisbury and considers it an unlawful use of force by the Russian state against the UK. According to the British officials, Sergei and Yulia Skripal were poisoned in Salisbury with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia.

The main arguments used by the UK to support its case have been summarized by Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson in his article in the Sunday Times on 8 April, as follows:

"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.

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.

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”.

The fate of Alexander Litvinenko, murdered in London in 2006, demonstrates the Kremlin’s willingness to kill someone in this country. The Russian Duma has actually passed a law that allows the assassination of “extremists” overseas.

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”.

X. Summary of the official position of the Russian Government

1. Russia has nothing to do with the incident that took place in Salisbury on 4 March.

2. The UK authorities have made quite serious accusations against Russia without presenting any evidence. Subsequent events have shown that no evidence of Russian involvement exists. The only concrete fact that the UK is putting forward is the identification of the substance used as “Novichok”, “a nerve agent developed by Russia”.

3. 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”.

4. Apart from that, the British “assessment” of Russia’s responsibility is based on unverifiable statements and artificial constructs. The forcefulness with which the government is pressing these constructs only further illustrates the lack of facts.

a) The British government claims having “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”.

Yet 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. It is not clear why the UK did not raise this issue in 2017, if it had information of Russia producing military-grade chemical agents in contravention of its obligations. 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.

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.

b) The UK has pointed at an “obvious motive” for Russia targeting Sergei Skripal. They have quoted President Putin who allegedly made a “threat” that “traitors” would “kick the bucket” and “choke”.

In fact, in the cited 2010 TV interview President (then Prime Minister) Putin actually directly denied the policy to assassinate traitors. Consider the transcript:

“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, Britain seems to 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.

c) The UK refers to a “track record of state-sponsored assassinations”, citing notably the murder of Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006. This allegedly “demonstrates the Kremlin's willingness to kill someone in this country”

In reality, 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.

d) British officials claim that the Russian Duma has passed a law that allows the assassination of “extremists” overseas. This is outright lie. There is no such law in Russia.

The closest Russia has 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.

5. The UK has not complied with its obligations under consular conventions. Yulia Skripal is undisputedly a Russian citizen who has the right to contact with consular authorities, and consular authorities have the right to contact with her. Given all the circumstances, allegations of her unwillingness to receive consular assistance cannot be taken for granted and need to be verified. Sergei Skripal appears to be UK citizen, yet he has never forfeited Russian citizenship and the related rights. He is fully entitled to seek Russian consular assistance, and the Embassy is fully entitled to provide it.

6. The legal basis of British actions in the OPCW is doubtful. Instead of using the normal OPCW procedures whereby the UK could have engaged Russia directly or through the OPCW Executive Council (under Article IX CWC), 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".

7. Analysis of all circumstances shows that UK authorities have embarked upon a policy of isolation of Mr and Ms Skripal from the public, concealment of important evidence and blocking an impartial and independent investigation. The situation around the Skripals looks more and more like a forcible detention or imprisonment. If British authorities are interested in assuring the public that this is not the case, they must urgently provide tangible evidence.

ANNEX:

Russia's requests and questions to the UK

Requests

Note Verbale of 6 March 2018:

To issue an official comment on the incident. Done.

To provide information concerning the health condition of Mr and Ms Skripal and on the circumstances that led them to being hospitalized. Partially fulfilled.

To take note of the request my Mr Skripal's niece, Viktoria Skripal, to be informed of their health condition. Ignored.

Note Verbale of 13 March 2018:

4. To provide samples of the chemical substance allegedly used. Denied.

5. To provide full information on the investigation. Ignored.

Note Verbale of 14 March 2018:

6. To enable consular access to Mr and Ms Skripal. Denied.

Note Verbale of 16 March 2018:

7. To provide a full medical report on the health condition of Ms Skripal. Ignored.

8. To provide up-to-date visual materials confirming that Ms Skripal is safe and well treated. Ignored.

Note Verbale of 31 March 2018:

9. To conduct a joint investigation of the Salisbury incident and to hold urgent consultations on this matter. Ignored.

Note Verbale of 2 April 2018:

10. To provide all necessary assistance to Viktoria Skripal, including by issuing her a visa and allowing her access to her relatives. Denied.

Note Verbale of 3 April 2018:

11. To provide legal assistance to the Russian investigative authorities who have opened a case regarding attempted murder. No information.

Note Verbale of 5 April 2018:

12. To forward contact details of consular officials to Yulia Skripal. Allegedly fulfilled.

Letter of 6 April 2018:

13. To have a meeting between the Ambassador and the Foreign Secretary. No reply.

Note Verbale of 9 April 2018:

14. To confirm or deny whether Mr and Ms Skripal are about to be resettled to a third country under new identities. Ignored.

15. To confirm or deny whether Mr Skripal's house will be demolished. Ignored.

16. To confirm or deny whether the alleged RAF-intercepted message from Syria formed part of information on the basis of which the decision was taken to expel Russian diplomats. Ignored.

Note Verbale of 10 April 2018:

17. To provide urgent proof that all actions in relation to Yulia Skripal are being taken in strict observance of her free will. Ignored.

18. To clarify conflicting reports as to whether OPCW experts directly took biomedical samples from Mr and Ms Skripal. No reply from the UK. OPCW confirms taking samples.

Note Verbale of 11 April 2018:

19. To explain how exactly the UK has complied with its obligations under consular conventions. No reply so far.

20. To confirm or deny whether Yulia Skripal has been moved to a "secure location", and to provide verifiable information on Mr and Ms Skripal's whereabouts, their health and wishes. No reply so far.

Questions

Note Verbale of 22 March 2018:

What is Mr and Ms Skripal's exact diagnosis and condition? Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.

What treatment are they receiving? Partially answered by Salisbury District Hospital.

Is that treatment the same as that provided to Sgt Nick Bailey? No information.

Why has the condition of Mr Bailey and Ms Skripal improved, while Mr Skripal remains in a critical condition? No information.

Did Mr Bailey, Mr Skripal and Ms Skripal receive antidotes? No official reply. According to Porton Down Chief Executive, no antidote exists against the substance used.

Which antidotes exactly were administered? See 5 above.

What information and medical effects led to the decision to administer antidotes?

How had the medical staff identify which antidotes to use? See 5 above.

Why are there no photos/videos confirming that the Skripals are alive and at hospital? No information.

Did the Skripals agree on Salisbury CCTV footage to be shown on TV? No information.

If not, who gave the agreement on their behalf? No information.

Is that person also entitled to authorize the publication of photos/videos? No information.

Is that person also entitled to authorize consular access? No information.

What protection against chemical exposure is used by the medical staff? No information.

If consular access is impeded by the risk of exposure, can the same protection be used by a consular officer? No information.

Note Verbale of 26 March 2018:

15. Could the hastiness in administering antidotes aggravate the condition of Mr Bailey, Mr and Ms Skripal? See 5 above.

16. Where, how and by whom were blood samples collected from Mr and Ms Skripal? No information from the UK. OPCW says their experts took samples.

17. How was it documented? No information from the UK.

18. Who can certify that the data is credible? No information from the UK.

19. Was the chain of custody up to all the OPCW requirements when evidence was collected? No information from the UK. OPCW says chain of custody has been respected.

20. Which methods (spectral analysis and others) were used by the British side to identify, within such a remarkably short period of time, the type of the substance used? No information.

21. Had the British side possess a standard sample against which to test the substance? No information.

22. Where had that sample come from? No information.

23. How can the delayed action of the nerve agent be explained, given that it is a fast-acting substance by nature? No information.

24. The victims were allegedly poisoned in a pizzeria (in a car, at the airport, at home, according to other accounts). So what really happened? How come they were found in some unidentified time on a bench in the street? No official reply. Police says the victims came into contact with the poison through the front door. No further details available.

25. How do the hasty actions of the British side correlate with Scotland Yard's official statements that "the investigation is highly likely to take weeks or even months" to arrive at conclusions? No information.

Note Verbale of 28 March 2018:

26. Why have the authorities ignored the fact that Mr Skripal's niece has been enquiring of her uncle's and cousin's health? No information.

Note Verbale of 29 March 2018:

27. Is it true that Yulia Skripal has regained consciousness and can communicate, eat and drink? Reply received.

Note Verbale of 31 March 2018:

28. Why has Russia been denied consular access to the two Russian nationals, Sergei and Yulia Skripal, that have become crime victims in the British territory? Reply unsatisfactory.

29. What specific antidotes were administered to Mr and Ms Skripal, and in which form? How were those antidotes available for the medical staff on the site of the incident? See 5 above.

30. On what grounds has France been involved in technical cooperation with regard to the investigation of an incident in which Russian nationals had suffered? No information from the UK.

31. Has the United Kingdom informed the OPCW of France's involvement in the investigation? No information from the UK.

32. How is France relevant to the incident with two Russian nationals in the UK?
No information from the UK.

33. What British procedural rules allow a foreign state to be involved in a domestic investigation? No information from the UK.

34. What evidence has been passed to France for studying and/or for a French investigation? No information from the UK.

35. Were French experts present when biological material was taken from Mr and Ms Skripal? No information from the UK.

36. Have French experts studied biological material taken from Mr and Ms Skripal, and at which laboratories? No information from the UK.

37. Does the UK possess the results of the French investigation? No information from the UK.

38. Have the results of the French investigation been passed to the OPCW Technical Secretariat? No information from the UK.

39. On the basis of which characteristics (“markers”) has it been ascertained that the substance used in Salisbury “originated from Russia”? No official reply. Porton Down Chief Executive confirmed that the experts did not make that conclusion

40. Does the UK possess reference samples of the military-grade poisonous substance that British representatives identify as “Novichok”? No information.

41. Has the substance identified by British representatives as “Novichok” or analogous substances been researched, developed or produced in the UK? No information.

Note Verbale of 5 April 2018:

42. Were the animals of Mr Skripal (two cats and two guinea pigs) subject to chemical poisoning? What treatment are they receiving? According to public statements, the animals are dead. No information on chemical poisoning.

Note Verbale of 6 April 2018:

43. Were the animal remains tested for a toxic substance, which would constitute useful evidence? No information.

44. Why the animals have been disposed of when they could have constituted an important piece of evidence? No information.

Note Verbale of 6April 2018:

45. What immigration rules has Ms Viktoria Skripal violated? No information.

46. What options are available to her should she wish to go ahead with her visit?

Reply received: Viktoria Skripal may submit a new visa application.

Note Verbale of 10April 2018:

47. What symptoms did Mr and Ms Skripal experience on admission to hospital?

No official reply.