

**Briefing by Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Non-
Proliferation and Arms Control Vladimir Yermakov**

Moscow, March 21, 2018

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, friends,

Good afternoon.

We are glad to see you at the Foreign Ministry on this cold wintry day that nevertheless carries a promise of spring.

We are grateful to you for responding so quickly to our invitation, which we issued only yesterday.

The situation is indeed unusual. There is an urgent need for a non-politicised and highly professional discussion of the Skripals' poisoning case. We have distributed a position paper. We ask you to bring it to the notice of your governments.

The language of this position paper, just as any other such paper, is dry legalese with technical details.

It would be wrong to invite you here just to say this. I propose that we hold an open discussion in this closed diplomatic group.

Let us look at hard facts, beginning with the humanitarian aspects of the case at hand.

On March 4, 2018, two people, one of them Russian citizen Yulia Skripal, were attacked in Salisbury, a flourishing city in the south of England.

Various versions of the circumstances of this tragedy have been voiced in the UK. They highlight the use of chemical agents, which the British call Novichok, for some reason. All of these versions do not stand up to any criticism.

In this situation, UK officials have laid the blame on Russia hastily, hysterically and without presenting any evidence, and demanded explanations from us.

I would like to repeat that it was a Russian citizen who has been attacked in the UK. Logic suggests two possible variants. Either the British authorities are unable to ensure protection against such terrorist attacks on their territory, or they were directly or indirectly involved in the preparation of this attack on a Russian citizen. There is no other alternative.

We are surprised, to put it mildly, that the British authorities had denied even consular access to the Russian citizen who has been attacked contrary to the elementary norms of civilised interstate relations. They are prevaricating, but at the same time they distribute video footage from the hospital where the Skripals are allegedly being treated. But this only raises more questions.

The British have refused to share the information obtained by their investigators and have not replied to the Russian requests regarding Yulia Skripal. We have no reliable information about what happened to this Russian citizen over the past two weeks and why this happened to her.

This is hard to comprehend: these events are unfolding in the 21st century in a country that is considered civilised.

Naturally, demanding any explanations from Russia in this situation is simply absurd. Russia does not owe anything to anyone in this context, and it cannot be held accountable for the activities or inactivity of the British authorities in their national territory.

We see that the British authorities are becoming increasingly nervous, which is logical. The clock is ticking. They have driven themselves into a corner. Ultimately, they will have to answer a growing number of questions, but they have no answers.

The inference that they have made a mess of things but Russia is responsible anyway and must be held accountable is the wrong kind of logic. This logic may be good for a British or US movie, but it does not work in real life, especially in relations with Russia.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the attack on the Skripals in Salisbury is most likely a clumsy staged provocation. We must expose those who have orchestrated this attack and the reasons behind it.

One thing is clear: Russia has absolutely nothing to do with this if only because such an audacious undertaking would be unacceptable and damaging for Russia in every respect.

But the United Kingdom has a completely different record. Suffice it to recall how former Prime Minister Tony Blair openly admitted not so long ago that the British leadership and intelligence services lied to themselves and to the British nation while plunging it into the bloody war in Iraq. Well, he did make this confession now, but hundreds of thousands of absolutely innocent Iraqi citizens had been killed as a result of that war, and no one has been brought to account for this.

One can only speculate as to who is trying to plunge the United Kingdom into another dirty and a priori unwinnable campaign against Russia, and for what purpose. Is this some kind of a hypnotic trance under the influence of Michael Basset's 'Strike Back' television series, aired in the United Kingdom several months ago and featuring the Novichok chemical agent?

Now let us look at the more serious and more formal aspect of this affair.

According to our British colleagues, this incident involved the use of chemical warfare agents.

This prompts the question whether these British officials have any idea of chemical warfare agents. Any self-respecting expert will tell you that the use of real chemical warfare agents inevitably causes numerous casualties in the immediate vicinity. However, judging by statements from London, the situation in Salisbury is absolutely different.

The subject of the investigation has not been accurately determined so far, and all the facts are being deliberately concealed. Moreover, real evidence could have disappeared during this time period, as has repeatedly been the case in the United Kingdom. Therefore it is difficult to understand what they are talking about, and what CWC obligations have to do with this.

Let us go on.

They are telling us that the United Kingdom contacted the OPCW on March 8, 2018. But London suffered a setback straight away.

The United Kingdom declined to cooperate with Russia, although the CWC stipulates a clear mechanism for interstate cooperation and for eliminating suspicions through open information exchanges and consultations. It appears that there is no other more constructive, simpler and more logical option. All one had to do was send an official inquiry to the Russian side and receive an official reply in ten days, as stipulated by the CWC. However, the British side rejected this option from the very beginning. In other words, London clearly demonstrated that it was not interested in resolving any issues and that it was probably pursuing some other goals.

I repeat, the CWC stipulates a simple and transparent mechanism of bilateral consultations. If the parties concerned really want to resolve issues, then this seems to be the most acceptable scenario for launching dialogue, to say the least. And if one of the parties does not want to resolve issues, then the entire affair inevitably becomes deadlocked.

Instead of conducting constructive expert dialogue and searching for solutions, one can, of course, run out into the marketplace and start screaming that someone has attacked him or her, that the culprit is obvious, but that, for some reason, that attacker is unexplainably far away. But this resembles some substandard thriller, one of many being generated by the film industry, and has nothing to do with politics.

It is unclear why all this surrealism should become part of real politics and real interstate relations.

In any event, Russia certainly has no intention of encouraging or even responding to these brazen actions of a seemingly civilised state.

Nevertheless, we met the British side halfway once again and suggested jointly investigating the Salisbury incident, so as to expose the culprits.

To this end, we, naturally, requested access to all materials of this case being investigated by the Scotland Yard. Otherwise it is simply impossible to gain an insight into the March 4 Salisbury incident.

Well, they turned down our proposal once again, without explaining their motives.

Moving on, we learned that on March 19, 2018 experts from the OPCW Technical Secretariat paid a visit to Great Britain after being invited formally by Mrs Theresa May to independently verify the analysis that had been made by the British government of the Salisbury incident.

Yesterday, the UN Security Council held a meeting with Director-General of OPCW Technical Secretariat Ahmet Uzumcu to discuss chemical weapons in Syria. However, our British colleagues also mentioned the Salisbury chemical incident. At the meeting, Russia was provided with yet another opportunity to ask Director-General of OPCW Technical Secretariat, as well as our British colleagues a few simple questions. Unfortunately, we did not get any convincing answers. The speakers provided elusive replies to the questions that we viewed as being most important.

Russia expects both London and the OPCW to provide a formal detailed review on all matters related to the Skripal case. We need full opinions with detailed evidence of the implementation of the appropriate chain of custody procedures under the CWC.

In addition to this, we intend to clarify with the OPCW under which paragraph of CWC Article VIII is the OPCW Technical Secretariat cooperating with Great Britain. It is important to note

that Article VIII is devoted to the OPCW structure and the distribution of powers among its bodies.

Moreover, another thing to keep in mind is that under the CWC the Technical Secretariat is not entitled to analyse national findings, as Britain has requested.

Here is another very important element.

Our British colleagues went as far as questioning the performance of the OPCW, the most reputable and effective international organisation in disarmament affairs.

The Russian Federation has successfully completed its national programme to eliminate its chemical weapons stockpiles in cooperation with 17 reputable OPCW state parties and the whole European Union and under OPCW's strict control. The chemical weapons stockpile of about 40,000 tonnes that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union was eliminated in its entirety. These data were carefully reviewed and confirmed by multiple inspection teams sent by the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

On September 27, 2017 the OPCW officially confirmed that Russia had completed the elimination of its chemical stockpiles ahead of schedule. For Russia, this matter was settled once and for all.

To be honest, dirty attempts by British politicians to muddy the waters of this noble undertaking do them no credit. London will never succeed in undermining the OPCW and CWC. We strongly believe that all 192 full CWC state parties will prevent this from happening.

London's malign attempts also suggest that the whole affair could have been orchestrated from the other side of the Atlantic. There is no secret that Great Britain's closest partner remains the only country in possession of the largest chemical weapons stockpile in the world. Of course, the increasing critique from CWC state parties does not suit them. Maybe this is the reason behind the dirty fuss around the Salisbury incident?

It is not my intention to indulge in conspiracy theories at this point. This is not something Russia plans to do. At the same time, we have more and more questions we would like to ask Great Britain, and not a single one of them has been answered so far in an intelligible manner.

The main issue still remains unclear. What actually did happen on British soil to two Russian citizens? So far, our British colleagues have been saying a lot of things which are rather confusing. There were too many inconsistencies.

Let me emphasise that we are carefully monitoring the developments around the Skripal case, and take note of all the details. We are confident that the masterminds and perpetrators of this provocation will be held to account.

In conclusion, allow me to mention one more important element so that you get a clear understanding of the matter.

Russia is not accusing anyone of anything.

May I ask foreign capitals not to distort messages coming from us.

Yes, in our statements we referred to chemical and technology capabilities of the Czech Republic, Sweden and several other countries. This was just to provide an example of advances in research and development across the world.

Again, please note that in this context Russia is not accusing anyone of anything. Professing groundless accusations against someone is not our style.

Thank you.

My colleagues from the Defence Ministry and the Industry and Trade Ministry have joined me for this briefing, which means that we can have an in-depth, substantial and open discussion.

I give the floor to Major General Igor Kirillov, head of the Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defence Forces of the Defence Ministry.

Igor Kirillov: Ladies and gentlemen,

We invite you to take a broader look at this problem. In light of the developments in Eastern Ghouta, Damascus has been again accused of using chemical weapons. At the same time, the international community prefers to close its eyes to the fact that the terrorists use chemical weapons against the Syrian government forces and civilians.

The Syrian government forces have found secret facilities for the production of chemical weapons in the liberated populated areas in Eastern Ghouta. It is obvious that these facilities were used to manufacture chemical munitions for provocations, which were subsequently blamed on the Syrian government forces.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry announced in early March that the militants in Eastern Ghouta were preparing a large-scale provocation against the Syrian government. Damascus officially confirmed readiness to provide all the necessary assistance for investigating chemical attacks in Syria. International organisations refused to cooperate with the Syrian government, thereby abetting the terrorists' illegal actions. The Syrian Foreign Ministry pointed out that over 40 tonnes of chemical warfare agents had been found in the areas liberated from the terrorists. The ministry added that the Syrian authorities had requested more than once that OPCW experts be sent to Aleppo, Khan Sheikhun and Eastern Ghouta. But the OPCW's Technical Secretariat rejected the request, arguing that this would be too dangerous.

Before of the 87th session of the OPCW Executive Council, the Russian Foreign Ministry received information to the effect that the terrorists were preparing provocations using chemical weapons to discredit Bashar al-Assad's government and to provide grounds for an anti-Syria decision that is being advocated by the US together with its allies.

The revelation of these intentions has prevented the US-led coalition from delivering the planned attacks at the key military facilities in Syria with the purpose of changing the balance of forces in favour of the so-called moderate opposition.

The fact that the 87th session of the OPCW Executive Council has shifted its focus from the Syrian chemical file to accusing Russia, without good reason, of the chemical attack in Salisbury and of violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is proof of the inability of the US-led coalition to attain its goals in Syria.

UK Prime Minister Theresa May has made a series of tough statements, saying that the Novichok nerve gas, which was allegedly used to poison Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia, could only be produced in Russia. Our British colleagues have not provided any hard evidence. They disregard our requests for mutual consultations, explanations or samples collected at the

site of the tragedy. It looks like Britain is afraid of what an objective and professional investigation by top experts might reveal.

In fact, all groundless accusations against Russia are based on the interview and statements by Vil Mirzayanov. Let me remind you that he immigrated to the US in 1996, and now lives in Princeton, New Jersey, and works for the US Government. He supported the Russian opposition on numerous occasions and signed a petition titled Putin Must Leave. In 2008, Vil Mirzayanov published “State secrets: An insider's chronicle of the Russian chemical weapons program.” The book featured a formula of the substance known in the UK as Novichok along with a detailed description of how to synthesise it.

According to Mirzayanov, Novichok is a nerve agent that is ten times more deadly than any agents known or developed until now. This powerful chemical warfare agent can be easily produced using formulas provided in this book. All is needed for that is to have a degree in chemistry, the necessary equipment and elements.

The Russian Federation views the publication by Vil Mirzayanov of the formulas for making toxic agents and ways to synthesis them as an act of abetting terrorism. Consequently, all questions on Novichok's alleged existence and properties should be addressed to Vil Mirzayanov, who works for the US Government. It was he who said that Novichok was a powerful chemical warfare agent. Russia has nothing to do with this.

Since 1970s, programmes to develop new-generation toxic agents have been carried out in Western Europe. Great Britain was and still is one of the countries involved in this programme, and has extensive experience and expertise in developing substances of this kind. Let me remind you that it was Great Britain who developed and on June 21, 1962 filed a patent under the number GB1346409A for the production of VX organophosphorus chemical agents. The patent was later sold to the US.

One of Great Britain's most important facilities in terms of developing and researching toxic agents is the Porton Down laboratory, located just a few kilometres from Salisbury – what a strange coincidence. It is well known and was officially acknowledged by the British Government in 2006 that the country carried out experiments on Ronald Maddison and 360 other people to study the effects of sarin on humans.

The Porton Down laboratory remains a top-secret location. Its official purpose is not only to dispose of old chemical weapon systems, but also experiment on protections against chemical and biological weapons, as the laboratory's official website claims. Recent media reports on the allocation by the UK Government of about 50 million pounds to the laboratory beg the question whether Porton Down researchers were planning to destroy that same Novichok they have been talking about so much. Yesterday, UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said in an interview that the country had samples of this agent.

According to recent media reports, the Porton Down laboratory was under a lot of pressure to conclude that the toxic agent used in Salisbury was of Russian origin.

As countries across the world seek to get rid of the existing chemical weapons stockpiles, Great Britain on the contrary expands its Porton Down laboratory and continues experiments, putting its own people in great danger, under the pretext of developing ways of countering chemical and biological weapons.

At the same time, the Russian Federation has been acting in good faith strictly in keeping with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). This fact was confirmed by Director-General of OPCW Technical Secretariat Ahmet Uzumcu, who issued a statement on September 27, 2017 confirming that Russia completed the elimination of chemical weapons on its soil. Despite the confirmation that Russia had eliminated its chemical weapons stockpile, Great Britain and the US continue to make groundless accusations against Russia of violating the CWC.

Accusations against Russia coming from the US are especially cynical, since the US has been unable to eliminate its chemical weapons stockpiles so far, citing the lack of resources to complete this effort. This is perplexing and outrageous. Can it be that a country with the largest defence budget in the world is unable to allocate funds in order to deliver on its commitments under the CWC? This is impossible to believe, taking into consideration that the US points to deficient funds whenever it faces international commitments that run counter to its interests, despite having ratified international instruments to this effect.

Comparing the Salisbury situation with the earlier provocations in Eastern Ghouta and Khan Sheikhan, it is obvious that Western countries are ready to use any dubious or illegal methods and means in order to discredit the Russian Federation and its legitimate Government.

Vladimir Yermakov: You will receive a memo in English. Our statements today serve as additions to it. What we said today was hardly news to anyone as we basically relied on the recent statements made by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and our permanent representatives to the OPCW in The Hague and the UN in New York.

It is exceptionally important that there are no unanswered questions on such serious matters. If we do pursue the goal of resolving the existing problems then they must be uncovered, discussed and solved. This is the only way to achieve a positive result. Unfortunately, we have not seen any positive steps on behalf of our British counterparts. I hope there will be a time when our British colleagues return to their highest diplomatic professionalism and top expertise. This was my personal attitude towards Great Britain and British experts. I am shocked at what we had to hear from their so-called politicians (it is hard to even call them politicians). It is a shame for the diplomats and experts from the UK with whom I have been in constant contact for years that such people are speaking out from London.

Question (representative of the Slovakian Embassy): Foreign Ministry Official Spokesperson Maria Zakharova named several countries developing chemical substances, including Slovakia. Would you please comment on this?

Vladimir Yermakov: Fortunately or unfortunately, Slovakia was named as part of Czechoslovakia. Later, we checked our database and Czechoslovakia indeed had a high potential of chemical technology development. Once again, this does not mean at all that we are accusing Czechoslovakia of anything. On the contrary, we positively described the high potential of the chemical industry in the country. By accident, through an oversight, it happened that not only the Czech Republic but also Slovakia were named on this list. We apologise for the accidental mistake. Again, we have absolutely no claims against the Czech Republic.

Question (representative of the British Embassy) (retranslated): In the context of this briefing it would be helpful to shortly clarify the situation and the actions taken by us with regards to the Russian Government, as they are seen through the British perspective.

After the said incident, we proposed to discuss the matter with Russia in a bilateral format but we have not received any constructive response yet. Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal were poisoned with the Novichok agent, which we consider an attempted murder. Great Britain concluded that there is a high probability of Russia being responsible for attempting to murder those people based on the following facts: the chemical substance was identified by our leading scientists and we had information that Russia used to produce the substance and still has the capacity to produce it. Russia did not offer any explanation on how the substance could be used in Great Britain and why Russia has an undeclared chemical programme in violation of international law. We have seen misinformation, attempts to manipulate facts and came to the conclusion that force was used against Great Britain, that the British society was put at risk, which is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and international law.

We need an answer. Did Russia produce the agent and why did Russia not declare it according to the CWC? We have asked Russia to explain how the agent got into Great Britain. We have not been given a response.

Vladimir Yermakov: I am very pleased that we have an opportunity to hear the British view. I think it is very helpful to everybody and confirms how far we are in our evaluations and approaches.

We are talking about two Russian nationals attacked in Great Britain. We have asked that you provide all the evidence of, as we believe, a terrorist attack against Russian nationals in Great Britain. The British refuse to give us anything and instead talk about some ‘Novichok’ and some Russian ‘attack’ against Great Britain. It is not our duty to provide anything to Great Britain as it was an attack on two Russian nationals on British soil. Let’s carry out a joint investigation with fully transparent data instead of making absolutely vague assumptions regarding any “novichoks,” “starichoks”(old-timers), or “durachoks”(fools). Please understand this is the verbiage of British television shows. Aren’t you embarrassed to speak about this in the presence of this audience, ambassadors from 150 states? This is ridiculous. I feel sorry for British diplomacy.

Russia has completely different goals and objectives in the world. Perhaps you should try and shake off your Russophobia and insular thinking (I do not mean to offend you, I hold very high regards for the British diplomacy and I am ashamed to hear all this). We have learned so much from our British colleagues and experts. Your expertise is of the highest possible level. So how about our experts and yours sitting down together and finding out what did happen? Why did you simply shut down and hide behind a shell? Why are you pointing fingers at us and saying that everything is our fault? What will happen next? We will definitely not respond to that.

I would like to give Viktor Kholstov, Director of the Centre for Analytical Research on Chemical and Biological Weapon Conventions under the Russian Ministry of Industry and Trade, an opportunity to speak.

Viktor Kholstov: I would like to say the following regarding the question from a representative of the British Embassy. I want to make it perfectly clear that Russia has not produced any toxic agents other than those it has declared under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1997. Consequently, we have no such weapons among our stockpiles. Russia declared all its chemical stockpiles, which were subsequently inspected by experts from the OPCW Technical Secretariat, whose inspection teams also verified the destruction of Russian chemical weapons.

The problem developed following publications by Vil Mirzayanov, who had moved to the US, probably to improve his financial standing after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ensuing economic hardships. Let us look at what he writes. His first publications did not contain any formulas of any new toxic agents. His first large monograph was published in Russian in the early 2000s. It did not contain any formulas or descriptions of a production technology, despite the fact that many other known toxic agents could be included in the category he subsequently named. I can cite the following examples. Slovakia has been mentioned here in connection with Czechoslovakia. I have great respect for the Czech scientist who was working on protecting the public from potential chemical weapon attacks. Professor Jiri Matousek is a big scientist, and I do respect him. However, back in 1994 he wrote about the danger of certain toxic agents in terms of their use in chemical warfare. Other scientists, including Ivan Macek, identified several dozen such chemicals.

Here is a list of such agents that was compiled back in 1994. It has no relation to Russia or any of the other current developments. The list provides complete data on the toxicology of these agents and their structural formulas. There are several dozen such agents. The CWC was submitted for signature in 1993 and any amendments to the text, despite the fact that the convention stipulates a procedure for amending the list of toxic agents, would have delayed its implementation. This is why no state with knowledge about such chemicals did anything at the time.

Furthermore, I would like to point out that extensive research involving these toxic agents was conducted at the Edgewood Arsenal facility of the US Department of Defence. I cannot say that this research was based on the data provided by Professor Matousek or other scientists. Here is the database for one such toxic agent, with the spectra of toxic chemicals, which was a novelty at that time. Professor Matousek did not have this information; he only had the toxicology data. It is an official database for one of such compounds. It dates back to 1998 and comes from the Edgewood Arsenal.

Vil Mirzayanov did not have these formulas in the early 2000s. Trying to earn a living and to improve his finances, Mirzayanov published a new book, probably in cooperation with the Edgewood Arsenal, titled “State secrets [An insider’s chronicle of the Russian chemical weapons programme].” This book included some formulas. Naturally, he implied a Russian connection for political reasons, as he would not have benefitted from this publication otherwise.

Why didn’t he write this before, if he knew about it? Because he had to provide proof, which was only available in the above database. The US sent the book to the OPCW Technical Secretariat. The OPCW’s Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) carefully analysed the problem and ultimately presented its conclusions.

According to the SAB, the issue of new toxic agents has been attracting increasing attention in recent years, particularly among non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Although only a small amount of information has been made public, it was claimed that a new type of nerve agents named Novichok has been developed. In December 2008, a former Soviet defence scientist published a book, claiming that the toxicity of certain Novichok agents may exceed that of VX. At the same time, the SAB stated that it had insufficient information to comment on the existence or properties of Novichoks. In this connection, the SAB said that the OPCW

as the organisation established to oversee the implementation of the CWC must expand its knowledge about such toxic agents in order to facilitate the implementation of the Convention.

Any state has the right to issue a statement if it has the data for creating a database and submit it to the CWC. However, Mirzayanov clearly provided the formula only after this information had been confirmed by Czech scientists within the framework of permitted research, which takes a very long time, and only after he gained access to the data of the Edgewood Arsenal facility. And he probably did so at the prompting of his American colleagues.

As it was rightly said by General Igor Kirillov, head of the Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defence Forces, Article I of the Convention stipulates that “each State Party to this Convention undertakes never under any circumstances to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons, or transfer, directly or indirectly, chemical weapons to anyone.” The publication of materials such as those in Mirzayanov’s book is evidence of indirect transfer of knowledge about chemical weapons, which is tantamount to indirect transfer of chemical weapons. Why has the US administration published this book? Can anyone answer this question? I don’t think so, because it is a clear and flagrant violation of Article I of the CWC.

This problem was later discussed many times at the OPCW’s review conferences, all of which adopted similar decisions.

Question (by a representative of the Embassy of Serbia): Serbia was exposed to hysteria coming from Western countries in the 1990s as well. Fake news and lies were rife. I would like to draw a parallel with what led to the bombing of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then Serbia. I’m referring to the Sarajevo market bombing, of which the Serbs were accused. Later, in 1999, when they wanted to take Kosovo and Metohija away from Serbia, the British and the Americans collected the bodies of the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army soldiers and invited CNN reporters over telling them that the Serbs killed those people. This caused the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 with the use of unconventional weapons, such as depleted uranium. As a result, the cancer incidence in Serbia increased 12-fold. Those who bombed us did not pay attention to this. Remember, in 2003, Colin Powell showed a test tube allegedly containing a chemical substance and accused Saddam Hussein of producing chemical weapons, which led to bombing Iraq, including, reportedly, with the use of chemical weapons. Do you draw any parallels with the current situation surrounding Sergey Skripal's poisoning?

Vladimir Yermakov: I believe, one can draw lots of parallels. We understand the assessments of our Serbian comrades and brothers, with whom we, of course, agree. We’ve been helping them and will continue to do so. By the way, I appreciate Colin Powell as a professional. I knew him personally. We talked when I worked at the Russian Embassy in Washington and was responsible for the military-political aspect of relations between our countries. Of course, this was a case of high-level policy when Powell mustered enough strength to admit his mistake. I would like to see more politicians in the UK who are really trying to understand what is going on, rather than jump to hasty conclusions, so that at the end of the day you don’t have to regret what you did earlier. Probably, such a parallel is more appropriate in this particular case. Pigeonholing is the easiest thing to do. Our goal is different though. We want to build mutually beneficial relations with all states, including, of course, the UK. Perhaps, everyone would benefit from reducing the number of such cases in our interstate relations. It would be much

better if we gathered for briefings to discuss absolutely different topics and talk about our interaction in addressing real matters, rather than some fictitious events.

We are grateful to our Serbian comrades for remembering those events which may not be forgotten under any circumstances. NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia is a black stain on relations between the states. Nobody should forget this, because, unfortunately, back then the world was a place where just about any state could be subjected to such a bombardment based on the contents of some obscure “test tubes.” However, we hope that such a world is already history, and no one will now even harbour such a thought. Right in the centre of Europe, civilised democratic states and members of the European Union use bombs filled with uranium. Talk about the highest degree of democracy, humanism and European values at their best... I can keep talking on this subject, as there are things to say.

Question by a staff member of the French Embassy in Russia (via interpreter from English): First, I would like to express our solidarity with our British colleague in connection with the chemical attacks in the UK. We are interested in an investigation conducted by the British authorities. Notably, chemical weapons have not been used in the EU since World War II. That's why the Salisbury incident has become a matter of international security for us. I believe we can all agree that the OPCW is one of the most reputable international organisations. Will you trust the results of the work being carried out by the OPCW experts in conjunction with British experts on the Salisbury incident?

Vladimir Yermakov: I already answered this question today. I can only remind you that it's not possible to assess what happened in Salisbury acting within the framework of the OPCW and the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. In any case, more in-depth expert assessments will be needed for Russia to be able to draw any conclusions. We need to conduct our own investigation. Frankly, such unseemly plans as investigating this incident without disclosing the facts, and then presenting the results as the ultimate truth will not fly with us. We are aware of how some reliable – as you call them – mechanisms worked in Syria. However, and it was fully confirmed, it was a sham. So, I can't assure you that Russia will accept actions taken by the OPCW experts and the results of investigation in Salisbury as the ultimate truth. We will definitely not do so. If you want to investigate it – we are ready to work together. If you don't, it's a completely different matter. I'm somewhat surprised by your phrase that France fully supports the UK and the investigation. Well, good for you. We understand that you were forced to do so. Why say it here? That's just ludicrous. You, in France, don't have any information about this case whatsoever. This is some kind of morbid solidarity within NATO and the EU.

Igor Kirillov: I would like to add to that. The stance adopted by the UK in this very serious matter is surprising. The OPCW Technical Secretariat proved that ISIS is using and manufacturing sulphur mustard gas in Syria and Iraq. Are you really more interested in accusing Russia than conducting a thorough investigation into the incident? Is it that Britain, as a country, doesn't care about its people? The capabilities of the militants are quite large, we can all see it, and it was confirmed. So let's conduct a professional-level investigation, rather than simply blaming Russia for the fact that “Novichok” was manufactured there a long time ago. What's “Novichok” after all? I know what methyl-phosphonic acid isopropyl ether fluoride is. What do you have in mind when you say “Novichok?” Let's have the professionals take care of the investigation.

Question by a representative of the Embassy of Sweden, (via interpreter from English): I have two comments that, in my opinion, might be useful. The first comment is linked with what my colleague from Slovakia has already said. Sweden has also been mentioned in this context. I would like to note that Sweden has stated its position on this issue very clearly. We have denied unacceptable accusations, expressed by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, that the nerve gas used in Salisbury might have been originating from Sweden. Second, I would like to say that, like my colleague from France, Sweden, as well as the EU, has expressed solidarity with the United Kingdom and expressed support for it.

Vladimir Yermakov: I would like to thank the representative of Sweden very much. If you have come across any accusations with regard to Sweden in the remarks of Maria Zakharova, Director of the Foreign Ministry's Information and Press Department, then I am ready to apologise to you because the Russian side certainly did not express any accusations with regard to Sweden. It is probably good that you are showing solidarity with the United Kingdom because you have to help each other. Maybe we should all solidarise and start a truly professional investigation of this matter, instead of misusing such words as novichok, starichok (old man) and durachok (fool). There are many such words in the Russian language.

Question by a representative of the Embassy of Germany (via interpreter from English): Earlier, you said that to resolve this issue, the United Kingdom should have addressed it in a bilateral format, under the Chemical Weapons Convention. On March 13, the Russian Foreign Ministry made its first statement on this issue. If I am not mistaken, it suggested that, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry, the official British response was a clear provocation aiming to discredit Russia. In your opinion, does this statement meet Moscow's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention to resolve the issue in a conscientious manner and bilaterally, especially with due consideration for the legitimate questions raised before Russia the previous day by British Prime Minister Theresa May?

Vladimir Yermakov: To be honest, I don't know what your area of expertise is. Any expert on arms control knows the procedure for setting forth one's position and how to conduct international talks. It goes without saying that if you want to accomplish something, you first present an argument and then jointly reach a conclusion. If a representative of another state approaches you and starts accusing you of something, without presenting any evidence, it is impossible to quickly resolve the issue.

I don't quite understand your question. I would like to emphasise once again that Russia insistently and consistently advocates a comprehensive investigation of the Salisbury incident. We are ready to take the most active part in this process. If they simply tell us that someone has found something somewhere, and that we are to blame for everything, then we won't make any headway. The United Kingdom's actions are its own problem. To put it simply, we will not respond to the question if it is put this way. If you want to conduct an investigation – invite us and disclose all data, and we assure you that we will find out the truth together. That's all, everything is simple and easy-to-understand. This is how serious interstate issues are resolved. Otherwise nothing will come of it.

Question (representative of the US Embassy): It is important in this forum to demonstrate that we in the United States also stand in complete solidarity with our partners in the United Kingdom, in the European Union and in NATO. It's important, especially in this forum, since

you have mentioned former Secretary of State Colin Powell and the courage that you suggest he demonstrated. It is very important that you, instead of demonstrating a similar type of courage, you attack, attack, attack my British colleague. In this forum in particular, instead of demonstrating the type of courage that we would hope to have seen in the 21st century, the Russian Federation continues its tried and true tactics of denying responsibility, distracting and disinforming. Again, we stand with our colleagues in the United Kingdom, and we will, as our colleagues in the United Kingdom, hold Russia accountable for its illegal actions.

Vladimir Yermakov: We are grateful to the respected representative of the US Embassy for his remarks. It would be interesting to know what American lawyers would make of them. You probably worked at the US State Department? Have we met before? I used to know everyone at the US State Department, and everyone there used to know me. That's water under the bridge... In the past, nobody in the US State Department talked to me in this manner. You are probably on a mission from Washington. Well, everyone has a mission to accomplish.

As for solidarity, we would like to see the day when the United States expresses solidarity with the Serb people who have been affected by the NATO bombing raids. Nobody can understand what happened in Salisbury. It is very good that you stand in solidarity with your NATO ally, your closest NATO ally. Overall, I can respect that. I am not being sarcastic. This is really very good, and it is the right thing to do. But we need to move forward. Let us really investigate this event. We have heard so many accusations thrown at Russia that we have stopped worrying. So, if you really want to investigate the Salisbury case, let's do it. This will be real solidarity.

Again, there is nothing to answer, because the question has not been formulated so far. We must have complete information regarding the investigation that is underway – I hope – in Salisbury, starting with the video monitoring cameras. This is the 21st century, after all, and the United Kingdom is one of the most technologically advanced countries. You have recorded everything. Share it with us, and we will help you to investigate this case.

Our Serbian colleague has said correctly that some analogies come to mind. Or take the crash of the Malaysian Boeing.

Do you remember that you had information blaming Russia for that tragedy even before the plane hit the ground? Or have you forgotten this? You ought to be ashamed. Don't you in the United States have any recorded data showing who really shot down the Malaysian Boeing? I understand that you will tell me that you work for the US State Department and that you have no relation to this. But you did record everything, because your satellite was right over the site. You know for sure who shot the Malaysian Boeing down. But everyone kept silent, and the investigation was deadlocked. And Russia was not invited to take part in it. Again, the blame was laid on Russia even before the Boeing crashed, which has been proved without any doubt. The United States has complete information regarding who did this and how it was done. Have you shared this information with Malaysia or the Netherlands?

Question (from the Ambassador of Venezuela): I would like to express our support for the Russian Government as it strives to resolve this matter in a responsible and transparent manner, and to invite the Government of Great Britain to do so as well.

We would also like to know who these people are who are bringing charges. As our friend from Serbia said, there were the bombers, as it was in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Why do you think this was done?

Vladimir Yermakov: You are asking interesting questions, but they are not quite in my portfolio. I deal with arms control, while your questions are more philosophical in nature. In general, your question already suggests some answers. Perhaps, you had the chance to hear the assessments that were provided at the high political level with regard to this incident, so I will not repeat them here, so as not to be misunderstood.

Our main job is not to wonder whether someone wanted to hurt Russia with this incident. Frankly, we have recently grown accustomed to painful blows from our colleagues in the United States and Great Britain, now even France has started making some obscure gestures. We almost don't react to them. We talk and think about ways to build new relations between states under the new abruptly changed circumstances. The world is definitely past the era of unipolarity, and it is absolutely clear that US clout is no longer what it used to be in the 1990s, when almost everything was decided by Washington, and no one dared to object. Our country and the Foreign Ministry were led by the people who couldn't even think about doing anything in defiance of what the US State Department said. Every person must decide for themselves whether it's good or bad. These times are gone forever. We must build our state-to-state relations based on the realities of 2018, rather than rely on past schemes developed by Colin Powell and Tony Blair, for which they had to apologise publicly.

Frankly, if you ask me for my personal take on what happened and the underlying reasons for what happened in Salisbury, I would say these were some pre-planned actions against Russia that could not stop this flywheel. So, it somehow manifested itself. I hope that reason will prevail in London. They may even not admit that they made a mistake – we do not need this. Let's interact to address matters that arise. We will not demand an apology from you. If there's a problem, let's deal with it. If you don't have a problem, then roll it back quietly. The key problem is that people are suffering. Two Russian citizens were hurt in the UK. We have serious doubts that anyone will be held responsible. This is not the first time such things are happening.

Drawing an analogy, we can evoke the case of Boris Berezovsky who asked President Putin to allow him to come back to Russia, but then committed suicide in London. Such "accidents" never stop happening to our British colleagues. This is not an isolated incident, it has already become a trend with the potential to make conspiracy theorists out of all of us. I would very much like not to see such accidents happen. If they do happen, then let's investigate them, if you want. If you are a civilised state, then make all the data available and let's investigate it together. Blaming Russia is foolish. Russia will never answer to you.

Question (from the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina): I'd like to ask my colleagues not to use the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the sake of these deliberations.

Vladimir Yermakov: We understand. Everyone has their own position, which is only right. Good thing we didn't touch upon the conflict between North and South Korea, otherwise we would continue for another three or four hours here. I'm not saying this tongue-in-cheek. Each state has its own stance, which it must make public. Of course, we will not use the Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict in our discussion here.

We have already gone over our allotted time. I would like to thank everyone again. Thank you very much for coming here and participating in this discussion. I would like to express my hope that our briefing today was helpful for our British colleagues in finding avenues of interaction. I can't say we have aided the investigation in any way. Of course, it's up to you how you want

to go about it. However, since Russian citizens are involved, we will demand that all pertinent data be disclosed.

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