

Remarks and reply by Ambassador Vassily Nebenzya, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, at the UN Security Council meeting regarding the March 13, 2018 letter from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

New York, April 5, 2018

Mr Chairman,

On March 14, the Security Council had an open meeting on the letter from the British Prime Minister Theresa May. It contains monstrous and absolutely unsubstantiated accusations against Russia over the use of chemical weapons on the territory of Great Britain.

Representatives of the United Kingdom promised to regularly brief the Council on the progress of the investigation. However, none have occurred. And so let us brief you in detail.

Today marks one month since Russian citizens Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia were found unconscious in the British town of Salisbury.

If chemical weapons were in fact used, this is a threat to non-proliferation and deserves consideration in the Security Council, particularly as we have what to say to our British colleagues and questions to ask.

So, what do we know about the crime and the victims?

Sergey Skripal, convicted in 2006 for espionage for Great Britain, had lived in that country since 2010 after being pardoned and retained his Russian citizenship. He was regularly visited by his daughter Yulia, a Russian national. According to the theory spun in the British media, Russia never forgave him for his treason and decided to take him out, even though he clearly presented no threat to Russia.

This gives rise to a number of questions. First of all, if we are to be entirely cynical about it, why should we wait eight years and decide to do this two weeks before the Russian presidential election and just several weeks before the FIFA World Cup in Russia? Why was he let out of the country at all?

Why take him out in such a strange, high-profile manner that poses danger to the perpetrators and bystanders?

Anyone familiar with detective stories (for example, the Midsomer Murders series, well into its 20th year) knows there are hundreds of relatively simple ways to cunningly dispatch a person. However, the assassins of Sergey Skripal and his daughter chose an extremely toxic chemical,

that is, the most risky and dangerous method. And they did not even finish the job, as the victims, by all appearances, are alive and Yulia, thank God, is rapidly recovering.

This case involves a lot of murky questions. And the deeper you go, the more there are.

From the very beginning, the UK authorities said through experienced chemists such as Prime Minister Theresa May and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson that the crime involved a toxic agent known as novichok and that it was “highly likely” that Russia was responsible for the poison attack.

If this super-potent agent was sprayed in Skripal’s house or on his door handle, which seems to be the favourite version of the investigation, how could Sergey and Yulia feel well for the next few hours, considering that Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who was the first to rush to the Skripals’ assistance, lost consciousness immediately? And how have they survived the attack? The only plausible explanation is that they were immediately given an antidote. Experts agree that to be able to do so, those who had the antidote at hand would have known exactly, not probably, which poison was used.

Porton Down, a British chemical research centre, is located several kilometres away from the crime site. We have many questions about its operations.

Unfortunately, Porton Down chief executive Gary Aitkenhead said on Tuesday: “We were able to identify it as novichok, to identify it was a military-grade nerve agent. We have not verified the precise source.” This is a true quotation. Moreover, he said that no antidote was given to the Skripals and suggested that the UK government probably had additional information regarding this. You have to hand it to Mr Aitkenhead for sacrificing his professional reputation to buttress the UK authorities’ speculation. He also said that there is no way that anything like that “would leave the four walls of [their] facilities.” What exactly is “anything like that” that would never leave the four walls of the Porton Down facilities? And does the OPCW know anything about this?

Anyway, the above has destroyed the main UK argument that the novichok originated from Russia “without a doubt,” the argument that was used as the basis for the evidence regarding the “highly likely” level of Russian involvement. On the other hand, Mr Aitkenhead’s statement has made this case even more mysterious.

We once again want to tell the world – urbi et orbi – that novichok has not been patented in Russia, despite its undeniably Russian name. The name was created in the West for a family of military-grade toxic agents, which, as expert and research communities know, were developed in many countries, including the US and the UK. Boris Johnson said in reply to a direct question from Deutsche Welle that people at Porton Down have the samples of novichok. Yesterday the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office deleted the tweet that stated that novichok came directly from Russia. This has created scandal and speculation. But the Chip and Dale rangers

from the UK security services rushed to the rescue of Boris Johnson, saying via The Times that they used research and intelligence data to establish the origin of the nerve agent several days after the Salisbury attack. They claim that the UK government knew as soon as March 7 that it was more than highly likely that the poison was manufactured in Russia. UK security services claim that they have pinpointed the location of the secret Russian laboratory where the nerve agent was manufactured. However, the security services' sources further said that while they are not 100 percent certain, they have a "high degree of confidence in the location." They also believe that the Russians conducted tests to see whether novichok could be used for assassinations.

And it is getting worse. The Daily Mail wrote yesterday that British intelligence agencies have "highly sensitive information" that Russia had been testing the deadly Novichok agent on areas such as door handles and everyday objects in the run-up to the Salisbury attack.

Gentlemen, I really don't know what to say. This is absurd! Couldn't you invent a more plausible fake story? On the other hand, we know about the credibility of British intelligence information from what Tony Blair said.

We have told our British colleagues that they have gone too far and will have to answer for this. There is a difference between making unsubstantiated accusations and talking professionally, which implies moving away from megaphone diplomacy to giving clear answers to warranted questions. I don't think British investigators will thank their own government for its hasty and presumptuous statements.

Your politicians probably did not imagine that this could happen. They never thought that their sensational statements could backfire. They enthusiastically made public a fake anti-Russia story about a Russian chemical attack, never thinking that they would have to answer for their words when the dust settles.

London also started working to sour Russia's relations with other countries. In an act of solidarity, several UK allies have expelled 150 Russian diplomats. We know that your ambassadors around the world are wringing the hands of sovereign states to make them follow this bad example. You have raised a wave that has reached New York. Your American allies have taken an unprecedented step: they have expelled 60 Russian diplomats, including 12 employees of Russia's Permanent Representative Office at the UN, without providing any substantiation or holding consultations, as stipulated in the special headquarters agreement, which conflicts with US obligations as the host country of the UN Headquarters. Regrettably, this is not the first time that the US has neglected its commitments. The US has seized Russia's diplomatic property, including the Russian property of the Permanent Representative Office at the UN in New York, has limited the freedom of movement for our diplomats to a 25-mile zone, and has refused to extend or issue US visas to them. We urge the United States to take a more

responsible attitude towards its duties as the host state, to give up what it has illegitimately seized and to avoid taking such steps in the future.

Mr President,

We are witnessing very strange events. At the March 14 meeting, I spoke about the latest legal innovation, that is, accusations based on suspicion without any hard evidence. There is one more equally surprising thing. One is completely baffled by the debates, interviews and statements made by UK politicians. O tempora, o mores [Alas the times, and the manners]! What has happened to good old Britain? What is the explanation for this - a total lack of professionalism, or the degradation of political culture? Or is this a new political culture? I don't know and suggest that those present draw their own conclusions.

The UK authorities have ridiculed Russia for suggesting 30 possible versions of what has happened. I would like to point out that these versions have not been proposed by the Russian authorities but by experts and journalists. Yes, there are many versions because there are no hard facts or evidence, and virtually everyone in Russia wants to get the facts straight in this murky story. The UK authorities have very few versions. More precisely, they have only one version, which they have presented as the verdict. At the same time, they cannot determine the source of the poison. Was it Skripal's house, the door handle, flowers, buckwheat or the bay leaf, after all? It should be said that people and experts from the UK and other countries, those who have the ability to think independently, have proposed various versions and are asking many questions, to which no answers have been provided.

Here are some of them.

Where were the Skripals during the four hours when their cell phones were turned off? How were the samples collected? Who can verify their reliability? Why have the Skripals' relatives not been asked for permission to collect blood samples? Where did the antidote against an unidentified chemical agent come from so quickly? Were the victims given an antidote at all? What did Sergey Skripal do [in the UK]? Who was he connected to? Where did he go? Who did he associate with? Did he meet with anyone that day or the day before? Where is the data from CCTV cameras? How do the hasty accusations correspond to Scotland Yard's statements to the effect that the investigation will take weeks or even months? Why has Russia been denied consular access to Russian citizens against whom a terrorist attack was probably perpetrated on British soil?

The UK authorities have flippantly decided that they can get away with their unsubstantiated insinuations. No, friends, this story, this investigation is not over. In fact, it has not even begun. On March 12, we sent a note to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office requesting access to the investigation results, including the samples of the chemical agent to which the British investigators referred, so that experts could study them within the framework of a joint

investigation. We did this in keeping with Clause 2 of Article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which stipulates that member states should first make every effort to clarify and resolve, through exchange of information and consultations among themselves, any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with this Convention. As per this article, Russia was prepared to respond to any UK request within 10 days.

Instead, London issued an absurd 24-hour ultimatum. Of course, we rejected it. Nobody has any right to speak to Russia like this, under any circumstances. According to that ultimatum, which Boris Johnson read out to the Russian Ambassador in London, “The Foreign Secretary made clear... that there are only two possible scenarios. Either the Russian State has attempted murder on the British soil using a chemical weapon or Russia lost control of its stockpile of nerve agents. The Foreign Secretary asked the Russian Ambassador to explain which of the two possibilities was true and to account for how this Russian-produced nerve agent could have been deployed in Salisbury.”

A 24-hour ultimatum! These are the “numerous questions” the UK side has asked us. No other questions! Knowing what we know today, including additional information and statements, this UK position looks even more absurd.

On March 14, Ms 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. Our British colleagues seem to forget that if they decide to act within the framework of the OPCW, which we consider as the only correct option, they will have not just rights but also obligations, including before Russia as a full member of the OPCW. We reminded them about this during the emergency meeting of the OPCW Executive Council, which was convened at Russia’s initiative yesterday. We proposed a draft decision on a joint investigation. The UK and its allies blocked the adoption of this decision and immediately hailed this as a victory, although the combined number of those who voted for this decision and who abstained was larger than the number of those who voted against it. Indeed, why should the UK conduct a joint investigation if it has appointed the guilty party even before launching an inquiry? A joint investigation could overturn their “streamlined version” that is based on such powerful arguments as “highly likely,” “overwhelmingly likely,” “highly plausible,” “there is almost no doubt,” “there is no other plausible explanation,” “Russia was almost certainly to blame,” “high likelihood of Russian responsibility” and “Russia is the likely perpetrator.”

Boris Johnson continues to claim that the UK has sent a number of questions to Russia and is still waiting for answers. But it is the other way around. As I said, we have not received any questions. I am asking my British colleagues now to send their questions to us, if they have any. But please, take note that ultimatums, accusations and the demand that we admit to the crime are not questions.

As for us, we have many questions for London, the OPCW and France, which has suddenly hastened to help verify the results of the British “express inquiry”, although this is not stipulated by any CWC provision. In reply to our question, France has said that the UK provided it with detailed information about its investigation. If London refuses to give us any information, maybe France will share it with us?

We have circulated a memorandum today, which you can read. We will also circulate some of the comments made by our Foreign Ministry spokesperson. You will find very interesting information there. I think you will find it very interesting. And we will also send you my statement and its translation into foreign languages.

Mr President,

The standards of intellectual substantiation of the accusations made against Russia and the search for motives for this crime are not even worth a laugh.

Boris Johnson, who claims to be a committed Russophile, has made an absurd – and this is putting it very mildly – and immoral suggestion that Moscow needed this incident to rally the people ahead of the election. In an equally immoral statement, he compared the upcoming FIFA World Cup Russia to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, which the Soviet Union did not attend but to which the UK sent a large delegation, including high-ranking officials.

Boris Johnson cited the novel *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, comparing it to the Skripal affair and saying that they are similar in the sense that “we are all confident of the culprit – and the only question is whether he will confess or be caught.” In fact, this is not the essence of the novel. It is not a crime story, contrary to what the UK Foreign Secretary may think, but a very deep novel about the human being’s view of the world and self-knowledge. By the way, we have already quoted a British saying from this novel about a hundred rabbits from which you cannot make a horse. I would recommend Mr Johnson to read Dostoyevsky’s other novels or at least their titles. I will not provide them here.

The UK Ambassador in Moscow presented his colleagues with “substantiated” proof of Russia’s guilt in the form of a slide show consisting of six pages, including the cover page. These comics, which contain nothing more than “highly likely,” are passed off as an evidential basis! We presume that Theresa May demonstrated a similar “irrefutable document” to her EU colleagues, many of whom (not all, to their merit) took this as “hard evidence of Russia’s guilt.” Look at this disgrace. We will now distribute it to you. To argue with these “hexagons” from the slide show is an insult to mind and reason. How they must disrespect those they are trying to convince with this! With this! And those to whom this “convincing” evidence is shown, don’t they understand that they are being brainwashed and are conforming to collective psychosis?

Boris Johnson’s deliberations about “the dead cat on the table” as a way to divert attention away from other problems (if anyone here does not know what I am referring to, they should read his

interview) are a clear example of the no-holds-barred propaganda warfare that the UK is now waging against Russia.

By the way, regarding dead cats, Skripal's niece Viktoria says there were two cats and two Guinea pigs in his allegedly contaminated house in Salisbury. Where are these pets now? What has happened to them? Why has nobody said anything about them? Their condition is very important evidence.

Mr President,

We live in a period of collective debilitation of reason. I do not know exactly which mind-changing agents are being used to brainwash the general public, except for one – the media. It is a deadly weapon of our times. The media can be used to manipulate the mind. And we see how brilliantly the Western media is doing this. No advanced intellectual algorithms are needed. It is enough to invoke the very basic reflexes by regularly and purposely repeating the same unsubstantiated lie, gradually implanting it into public consciousness and presenting it as the ultimate truth, in accordance with the recipe of Dr Goebbels: A lie told a thousand times becomes the truth.

We will continue to press you for answers to our questions. And if you do not give them, if you do not answer, we will consider this as admission that you have slandered us without even giving any thought to the implications.

We will continue to press you into genuine cooperation on the Skripals' case. And if you refuse, we will consider this as an attempt to conceal the truth.

Mr President,

The unfolding events have convinced us of what, as a matter of fact, was clear from day one. This is a coordinated and well-planned campaign. It is not something accidental. The main goal is clear. It is to discredit and even to de-legitimise Russia. To accuse it of using a terrible, inhumane weapon and concealing arsenals, as well as violating CWC provisions. To question its role not only in the settlement process in Syria, but wherever it may be. To question Russia's political legitimacy in principle. Also, to discredit our position on the Syrian chemical dossier. And not just to do this to us, but to enjoy it. Since the British authorities, without a moment's hesitation, have the audacity to claim that Russia is "highly likely" to be involved in the Salisbury incident, we, for our part, will also presume "with a high degree of probability" that special services of some countries are behind this enormous provocation.

Russia, which has nothing to do with the poisoning of the Skripals, has the greatest stake in establishing the truth. We will seek the truth based on the provisions of the CWC.

If Britain continues to operate on suspicions which it passes for evidence, if it continues to rely on assumptions based on speculation rather than facts, this will confirm our sense that it is highly likely that this murky business is a fiction, or, to be more precise, a crude provocation.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. We see the only way to create an objective picture as strict observance with CWC mechanisms and cooperation throughout the investigation. We are also waiting for the answers to obvious questions from the British investigation. We demand consular access to Yulia Skripal.

Here's the bottom line. The Russian origin of the nerve agent has not been confirmed. We have stated our innocence even before that. However, we are still required to "plead guilty." The United Kingdom refuses to cooperate with us on the pretext that "the victim cannot cooperate with the criminal." Excuse me, but there is no validity in designating us "criminals" without any facts, evidence, trial or investigation. A crime was committed, and possibly a terrorist act, against our citizens on the territory of Great Britain. They are the victims. So, we are entitled to demand cooperation, and the UK must provide it. By the way, it's funny that some allies of Great Britain encouraged us to cooperate with Britain at the session of the OPCW Executive Council yesterday. Apparently, they were not properly briefed in due time.

We have drafted a Security Council statement for the press. This is a litmus test for the sincerity of the UK and its allies. If you, like last time, bury this statement by turning what it says upside down, it will be more proof of your deceitful game.

Thank you.

In response to a statement by the Permanent Representative of Great Britain:

Mr President,

Unfortunately, today we haven't heard anything new from some of our colleagues, who continue to claim without any hesitation and reservation that Russia is culpable. They urge us to shed light on this incident. We would also very much like to discover the truth.

We hope that as we move along, more and more "shoots of truth" will find their way up to the light. I was going to thank my Dutch colleague who insisted today that we must cooperate with the British side. But on second thought, I better refrain from doing this, because the cooperation he proposed differs from what we understand as cooperation.

Essentially, they demand that we answer one question only: "Admit that you did it." We reply: "We did not do it." To this, they say: "No, this is not enough. How did you do it?" We reply: "Give us the proof." They say: "No, first you admit your guilt. This will be better for everyone."

Can't you all see that this is something straight out of the theatre of the absurd? We repeatedly pointed out that the UK had not complied with the OPCW rules and procedures. You can read about this in our memorandum we have just distributed.

I have to say, though, that today the UK Ambassador expressed readiness to share information about the investigation with the member states. We are looking forward to this. However, we hope that this new information will be based on more convincing materials than those that I demonstrated to you today. By the way, the explanation provided by the esteemed Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom regarding the reasons for the use and the legal nuances of the term "highly likely" in the context of British justice was quite amusing. We will make careful note of this.

Mr President,

In fact, there is nothing new under the sun. There used to be a wonderful British writer of children's novels, Lewis Carroll. He was a mathematician who wrote books as a kind of hobby. He wrote a marvellous book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. I would like to read out a short extract from it. It's about the trial of the Knave.

"There's more evidence to come yet, please Your Majesty," said the White Rabbit, jumping up in a great hurry. "This paper has just been picked up."

"What's in it?" said the Queen.

"I haven't opened it yet," said the White Rabbit, "but it seems to be a letter, written by the prisoner to--to somebody."

"It must have been that," said the King, "unless it was written to nobody, which isn't usual, you know."

"Who is it directed to?" said one of the jurymen.

"It isn't directed at all," said the White Rabbit. "In fact, there's nothing written on the outside." He unfolded the paper as he spoke, and added, "It isn't a letter, after all: it's a set of verses."

"Are they in the prisoner's handwriting?" asked another of the jurymen.

"No, they're not," said the White Rabbit, "and that's the queerest thing about it.' (The jury all looked puzzled.)

"He must have imitated somebody else's hand," said the King. (The jury all brightened up again.)

"Please, Your Majesty," said the Knave, "I didn't write it, and they can't prove I did: there's no name signed at the end."

“If you didn’t sign it,” said the King, “that only makes the matter worse. You must have meant some mischief, or else you’d have signed your name like an honest man.”

There was a general clapping of hands at this: it was the first really clever thing the King had said that day.

“That’s the most important piece of evidence we’ve heard yet,” said the King, rubbing his hands.

“Let the jury consider their verdict,” the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.

“No, no!” said the Queen. “Sentence first--verdict afterwards.”

Does this sound familiar, Mr President? If you think that this only happens in old fairy tales, even if these old fairy tales are very relevant, I will show you one more thing. It is an article from today’s Independent titled “Whether we can prove Moscow’s involvement in the Skripal case or not is irrelevant.” A short quotation: “The Russian response to all of this is to say “Prove it,” as if in a court of a law. Even on a legal test such as being beyond reasonable doubt or on the balance of probabilities, the Russians are plainly culpable.”

Mr President,

I have nothing to add.

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