

## **British Ambassador to Russia briefing on the Salisbury attack following the OPCW report**

**Dr Laurie Bristow briefed the international diplomatic community on the UK government's response to the OPCW report on the chemical used in the Salisbury attack.**

*13 April 2018*

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Thank you for joining me today for an update on the Salisbury incident.

As you know, on 14 March, the UK concluded that the Russian state was highly likely to have carried out the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK. We made this assessment on the basis of 4 conclusions:

The positive identification by experts at Porton Down of the specific chemical used as a type of Novichok nerve agent

The knowledge that Russia has produced this agent within the last 10 years and remains capable of doing so

Russia's record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations – including in the UK, and

Our assessment, based amongst other things on the statements of Russia's leadership, that Russia views defectors as suitable targets for assassination

The purpose of today's briefing is to provide an update on the further information that has been released that supports our conclusion that the Russian state was highly likely to be responsible for the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal.

I'll start with the first of our 4 conclusions: that the Skripals were poisoned by a specific chemical – a type of Novichok nerve agent.

Our identification of the chemical as one of the Novichok type was on the basis of analysis by world-leading experts at Porton Down. To ensure full transparency and strict adherence to international chemical weapons protocols, we invited the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to independently test these samples.

Yesterday the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons published an executive summary of its findings following a visit to Salisbury by OPCW inspectors between 19 and 23 March. The report says that the analysis by 4 separate OPCW designated laboratories outside the UK, I quote, “confirm the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical that was used in Salisbury and severely injured 3 people”.

The OPCW report released yesterday confirmed that the chemical was of high purity, with an “almost complete absence of impurities”. This indicates expert production, in a controlled scientific environment. It is consistent with that the UK's view that the substance used in

Salisbury was a weapons-grade nerve agent of the Novichok type that cannot have been produced by non-state actors.

Two things are key in understanding the OPCW findings:

First, throughout the OPCW's analysis, the OPCW maintained its own independent chain of custody for all samples. The samples were tested in 4 world-leading laboratories outside the UK. All drew the same conclusion as Porton Down. There is no doubt as to what was used in Salisbury. The OPCW's analysis puts the question of identification of the nerve agent beyond doubt.

Secondly, the purpose of the OPCW analysis was independently to confirm the identity of the toxic chemical used in Salisbury. It was not, and has never been, the remit of either the OPCW or our experts at Porton Down to confirm the source of the nerve agent or to assess a motive for the attack.

I would therefore like to explain a little more about how we reached our assessment that it was highly likely Russia was responsible for the attack in Salisbury.

The UK assessment that Russia is highly likely to be responsible for the attack in Salisbury – a dangerous, irresponsible act and clear violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention – is based on a number of factors, including but not limited to the scientific analysis of the nerve agent.

We are today making public a letter from the UK's National Security Adviser to NATO's Secretary General with further information that supports the UK's assessment that only Russia had the means, operational experience and the motive for carrying out the attack on the Skripals. The information is a collection of open-source analysis and secret intelligence that has formed our assessment. Printed copies of the letter have been distributed. And the newly released information shows that:

First, in the last 10 years, Russia has had a research programme to test means of using chemical warfare agents for assassination and to train personnel from special units in the use of these weapons.

This programme included investigation of ways of delivering nerve agents, including by application to door handles.

Second, our information shows that within the last decade, Russia has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks under the same programme. This supports the public statements of former Soviet scientists who have confirmed that the Novichok programme existed in the 1980s and was inherited by the Russian Federation.

And thirdly, our newly released information confirms that Russian intelligence services have maintained in recent years their long-standing interest in the Skripals. Sergei Skripal was arrested on suspicion of treason in Russia in 2004, sentenced to a 13-year prison term before being pardoned in 2010, after which he moved to the UK. Our information released today shows

Russia Intelligence Service interest in the Skripals, dating back at least as far as 2013, when email accounts belonging to Yulia Skripal were targeted by Russian military intelligence (GRU) cyber specialists.

We know that the Russian state has a record in state-sponsored assassinations including in the UK. We also know from public statements of Russian leaders that the Russian state views defectors as legitimate targets for assassination. The 2016 inquiry into the death of former FSB agent Litvinenko concluded that he had been deliberately poisoned by the radioactive substance Polonium-210 and that it was a “strong probability” that the FSB directed the operation.

Put the facts together and there is only one conclusion: only the Russian state had the means, the motive, and the record to carry out this crime. There is no plausible alternative.

Everything that the Russian state has done since the attempted assassination is consistent with that conclusion. Since the incident Russia has responded with denials, distraction and disinformation.

Russia has responded with countless theories and speculation: that it was an accidental overdose, suicide following addiction and stress, or even a drone. We have counted at least 28 different versions. Earlier this week, journalists from Russian state media entered the Salisbury hospital without permission in an attempt to cast doubt on whether the Skripals had even been poisoned at all.

The released OPCW evidence, confirming that the Skripals were seriously injured by the toxic chemical identified as one of the Novichok type, exposes those versions as fiction.

Russia has also continued to deny the existence of the Novichok programme, despite the testimony of several scientists who worked on the original programme in the 1980s, and our newly released information that Russia has stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks in the last 10 years. This is a clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Russia was and is obliged to declare all Chemical Weapon programmes back to 1946.

We do not expect the release of this information, or the conclusions of the OPCW report, to change Russia’s behaviour.

As the Salisbury incident showed, as well as Russia’s actions in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, MH17, cover-up for Asad’s use of chemical weapons in Syria, and malign cyber activity, Russia’s modus operandi is to flout the rules of the international system, and to cover its tracks with a barrage of disinformation designed to confuse and distract. This pattern is a fundamental threat to the rules based order which keeps us all safe.

This is why the response of the international community in holding Russia to account is so important. 28 countries have responded with an unprecedented expulsion of more than 150 Russian diplomats; this is the largest collective expulsion of undeclared intelligence operatives in history and an unequivocal statement that their persistent attacks on our security will not be tolerated. We are grateful to our allies and partners for standing with us.

We need to continue our efforts. We have called a meeting of the OPCW Executive Council to discuss the findings of the report on 18 April. We have also requested a meeting of the United Nations Security Council next week. We need to continue to hold Russia to account for its clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and for the attempted assassination in the UK using a nerve agent. The use of weapons of this kind can never be justified and must be ended.

Thank you for your support and solidarity over the last few weeks and in coming months. All the countries represented in this meeting have a common interest in maintaining and strengthening the moral taboo and the legal prohibition on the use of these terrible weapons by anyone, anywhere at any time.

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*Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/british-ambassador-to-russia-briefing-on-the-salisbury-attack-following-the-opcw-report-13-april-2018>*