

Skripal case developments further discredit British government lies

Simon Whelan
23 April 2018

The UK government responds to each exposure of its fabrications regarding the Skripal affair by concocting and promoting additional ones. Any evidence or argument that points to the ludicrous nature of the official line is denounced as the work of a dupe or a traitor.

On March 4, Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, were taken to hospital after being found unconscious on a bench in Salisbury. They have now recovered, with Yulia already discharged from hospital before being spirited away to a secret location, despite having supposedly been poisoned with one of the most fatal military-grade nerve agents.

Without revealing any evidence, Britain accused Russia of being responsible for an “attempted murder.” While failing to provide any convincing explanation as to why Russia would target a superannuated ex-spy and his daughter, the resulting hysterical anti-Russian campaign played a critical role in preparing the US, British and French bombing of Syria.

As the Skripal campaign unravelled, the British authorities have stepped up their claims. At an emergency meeting of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on April 18, British ambassador to the OPCW, Peter Wilson, accused Russia of “multiple narratives” and of having “no credibility.”

Wilson demanded that Russia “end its offensive chemical weapons programme” and “declare its programme of novichoks.” He accused Moscow of a “brazen disinformation campaign” to “attack the reputation and expertise of the OPCW” and “distract and brazenly misrepresent facts.”

The May government continues to refuse to adhere to basic international standards in depriving Russia of any information about the investigation into how two of its citizens became ill.

This deliberate ratcheting up of tensions on the part of the UK authorities is aimed at diverting from its own

campaign of disinformation, misrepresentation and outright lies. Central to this has been the willingness of the official media to regurgitate without hesitation, the latest propaganda from the government, intelligence agencies and police.

The summary findings of the OPCW made no mention of novichok —the Russian name for a family of nerve agents whose incessant repetition is meant to provide irrefutable proof of Moscow’s involvement. Nor did it mention Russia. The one time the OPCW referenced a “nerve agent,” it was prefaced with the caveat “allegedly.” The term used throughout is “toxic chemical.”

The OPCW report was thrown even further into question by Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The Swiss state Spiez Laboratory had conducted tests, Lavrov said, and contrary to claims that the Skripals were poisoned by a novichok nerve agent, it found the “substance used on Sergei Skripal was an agent called BZ” (BZ or 3-Quinuclidinyl benzilate).

BZ is a hallucinogenic incapacitating agent that afflicts both the peripheral and central nervous systems. Lavrov said this information was not included in the OPCW report. The OPCW subsequently rebutted Lavrov’s claim, asserting the non-presence of BZ and its precursors in the March 23 blood samples taken from the Skripals.

Russia has demanded full disclosure of all information related to the Skripal case. The full OPCW report was made available to all governments who are signatories to the Chemical Weapons Convention. There is no prohibition on any of those governments from publishing the full report or parts thereof.

If Lavrov’s statement accurately reflects the scientific findings and if the Skripals encountered BZ in some form, this could account for both the state in which they were discovered on March 4, and the fact that they have now recovered. It would also seem to explain Yulia’s

disorientation, which she mentioned in a statement, supposedly issued on her behalf by the Metropolitan Police.

On Saturday, the Russian Embassy in London said it asked the UK government to explain a statement from private individuals as to the origins of claims they made about the case. The Embassy's press secretary said, "Yesterday we learned from the BBC that the self-proclaimed inventor of the so-called 'Novichok' Mr Vladimir Uglev was sure that the Skripals had been poisoned with A-234 [another name for novichok]. He comes to this conclusion 'from all the spectrum data [he] was sent recently'...This is quite an extraordinary statement. It essentially means that a private citizen has been provided with the information that the Russian side has not been able to obtain from the British authorities for weeks."

The Embassy also pointed out that Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, the former commanding officer of the UK's chemical regiment, had made statements attributing blame to Russia based on access to "intelligence data."

"Of course, these allegations cannot be verified. But if we are to believe them, it looks like the British authorities share highly confidential data with private individuals. This is another gross violation of the OPCW rules. We have asked the FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] to confirm or deny this, and to provide us access to the files that these gentlemen refer to."

The contradictions continue to mount. On April 17, the UK government's Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) announced that the nerve agent supposedly used to poison the Skripals was delivered "in a liquid form," with only "a very small amount" used.

Only days earlier, police said the nerve agent had been deployed by smearing it on the front door handle of Sergei's house. No explanation was offered as to how this amateurish and unsophisticated ruse remained undiscovered for weeks or why no one other than the Skripals and a police officer had been apparently affected.

But the claims about front door handles and "liquid form delivery" are contradicted by the OPCW report summary on the case, which notes that there were no additives in the substance they analysed—which would have been necessary for it to adhere to the Skripal's front door.

More inconsistencies are revealed in the details of the cleaning of nine sites in Salisbury on Saturday to supposedly decontaminate them. There is no explanation as to why this is taking place six weeks after the Skripals

were found. Stories in the media of how the deadly poison was washed off the Skripals' door and diluted by the rain—just another of the implausible attempts to explain how the Skripals managed to survive a potentially deadly attack—have been shelved.

Now it is claimed that, far from it being diluted, there are potentially still "toxic" levels of the poison in isolated "hot spots." The government has mobilized 200 military personnel, who will be involved in a "decontamination" operation that could last months.

Moving swiftly over to the new narrative, the BBC reported, "The nerve agent does not evaporate or disappear over time, experts have said, and intense cleaning with caustic chemicals is required to get rid of it."

This was after Defra's chief scientific adviser, Ian Boyd, had told a public meeting that the nerve agent remained in high concentrations in "very specific locations" and could still be harmful. However, Boyd's remark was contradicted by a Defra spokesperson who insisted that the city "is safe for residents and visitors."

Residents have complained about the mixed messages. Although the government was quick to claim that a military nerve agent had been used against the Skripals, it was almost a week before Public Health Britain issued any safety advice to those who had visited the pub or the restaurant that the Skripals had visited. Even then Public Health England stated only that people who had visited those places should wash their clothes and merely "[w]ipe personal items such as phones, handbags and other electronic items with cleansing or baby wipes and dispose of the wipes in the bin (ordinary domestic waste disposal)."



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wswp.org/contact