



PRESS RELEASE

№ 22/18

Update on the Skripal case

(from the weekly Press Briefing by the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, September 7, 2018)



As you may have seen, in her speech before Parliament, Prime Minister of Britain Theresa May revealed new information presented by the British police on the Skripal case. The key point of her speech was the statement that investigators had acquired photos and videos depicting two suspects using the chemical agent Novichok, their itinerary in Britain, citizenship, and the names and surnames in the Latin alphabet. At this point, we do not understand and do not know whether this recently released information is complete or just part of what is known. Has this information been homogenised by British law-enforcement bodies or is it factual?

I think everyone read what was published. We did as well. I also hope that you read our statements on this. We published them on the official Foreign Ministry website on the same day. These statements are explicit and detailed. Let's return to this issue with an account of the questions we received.

So, according to the British version, the persons involved in the Skripal case that also includes the poisoning of two residents of Amesbury with a chemical substance are certain intelligence officers, Russian nationals, which were acting with the consent of high-ranking Russian officials. Britain claims at the top level that the crime was perpetrated by certain people depicted in photos released by the police. Scotland Yard immediately expressed the caveat that the family names of the criminals were most likely invented although it is known that they flew in from Moscow and that traces of Novichok were found in their hotel room.

This was followed by accusations that included the phrase “highly likely” that have become common around the world and that has now been upgraded to “almost certainly.” Everything about this story is absurd, especially Theresa May’s assertion that “only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to carry out the attack.” One gets the impression that the British Prime Minister lives in complete information vacuum and that the numerous statements by the Russian leaders and in general media simply do not reach her, or that they are not reported to her. Possibly, she is only shown excerpts from the programme News of the Week with Dmitry Kiselev, but isn’t shown the numerous statements by President of Russia Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, government officials, representatives from the Presidential Executive Office and the Foreign Ministry. I understand that Kiselev’s programme on Rossiya 1 is so popular that it is quoted in the British Parliament as Russia’s official position.

However, I am forced to disappoint Ms May. Russia’s official position has been expressed repeatedly by President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, official representatives of Russian government agencies and ministries, official spokespersons of the Presidential Executive Office and the Foreign Ministry.

It was also announced in London that Britain has repeatedly demanded that Russia report on its actions in Salisbury, whereas in response Russia has allegedly lied and tried to confuse everyone. This is simply untrue. This is not just an invention or an insinuation but simply an outright lie. All that was demanded of us on the very first day was to acknowledge two facts – either both or one of them. We were given a choice to admit that Russia: a) committed a crime in Salisbury or b) lost control of toxic chemical agents. We were also told that the matter deals with chemical warfare agents. No other questions were asked and no other agenda was suggested by Britain. Russia was offered a choice from these two options.

Although this was done in an unacceptable manner and was in effect an accusation in the form of an ultimatum, the Russian Federation continued the dialogue as we thought appropriate. In reality this has been a monologue that continues up to this day. During this monologue (we hope it will become a dialogue at some point), the Russian Federation sent many inquiries to official London. We published part of our unilateral

correspondence on the official Foreign Ministry website. This is not just a list but documents that the Russian Federation sent to its British colleagues at its own initiative through diplomatic channels. Moreover, I'd like to note that the British officials told us they could not present information through diplomatic channels and suggested that the Russian Embassy in Britain address the hospitals and the police independently, verifying and making the required inquiries. The Russian Embassy in Britain followed this advice and began addressing the police stations and hospitals. When they were swamped by Russian inquiries and did not deem it possible to respond, another "piece of indispensable advice" arrived. We were told that the Russian Embassy in Britain should not initiate inquiries to British hospitals and the police but should appeal to British diplomats via government channels. The Russian Embassy not only took notice of this information but began sending inquiries to the Foreign Office. We did not receive even formal replies to most of these inquiries.

So, when Theresa May says that Russia was offered an opportunity to answer questions, to submit a report but did not take advantage of this chance – this is far from the truth and more like overt misinformation. Let me repeat that Russia sent inquiries to Britain many times. Apart from the practical questions of what happened in Amesbury and Salisbury and a striving to receive concrete data in order to facilitate our own investigation in Russia, we also asked for direct access to the Skripals. We also suggested that representatives from law enforcement bodies in both states begin to conduct the investigation jointly.

At yesterday's session of the UN Security Council many states made absolutely absurd statements, urging Russia to start cooperating with British investigators. This is a mirror-world, beyond the theatre of the absurd, just delirium. Let me repeat again that we had to publish excerpts from the documents that we forwarded to the British side. Let me say it again, we published parts of them but we can publish all of them if need be. Needless to say, this does not conform to diplomatic practice but what London is doing does not conform to any civilised practice at all.

I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that we received many questions about these people and requests to confirm or reject their involvement with Russian government bodies.

After receiving the first information about the event in Salisbury, Russia made well-grounded official statements and not only at the political level but also at the highest government level that the Russian Federation had nothing to do with what had happened there.

Therefore, what happened in London on September 5 is yet another attempt to attract the attention of the international community, states, public organisations and journalists to these photos and present them as photos of people linked with Russian government bodies. This is a classic example of misinformation. Our position was well

known in London. It was stated on the record and repeatedly conveyed to Britain through diplomatic channels, to British Ambassador in the Russian Federation Laurie Bristow and via the Russian Embassy in London.

I would like to repeat the most important points that we have already presented.

1. The statement by British Prime Minister Theresa May in British Parliament on September 5, as well as her previous statements on Salisbury and Amesbury, were made in an unacceptable tone.

2. The latest statement, as well as the previous statements on this issue, contains unsupported accusations against the Russian Federation.

3. We resolutely reject the insinuations made by Britain. I think this is a tell-tale phrase. I'd like to emphasise that this statement is not being made for the first time. For over five months we have repeatedly expressed the Russian position at all levels.

4. We have noted the phrase that "only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to carry out the attack" in Salisbury. This statement was made immediately after the release of the report by the OPCW Secretariat. I would like to emphasise that this is the only "evidence" on which Britain's entire accusation rests. After all, the photos and videos that were presented are no evidence but just the photos of the so-called accused. As for the evidence itself, we were again told to take it at face value. I'd like to emphasise again that this is the only "evidence," notably that only Russia had the technical means, operational experience and motive to carry out the attack. We have repeatedly explained in this hall where representatives of the diplomatic corps were present, went on record in the OPCW and published on the official Foreign Ministry website the facts related to who tested this substance, on what scale, and who can produce it. We were not speaking alone. I'd like to recall that after several months it transpired and was confirmed by EU countries that similar substances were produced and tested in EU countries. Naturally, Britain itself and the United States have much experience in this respect. To a large extent, they are the main beneficiaries of this global provocation.

I'd also like to mention that the Foreign Ministry's official website carries many materials, including references, on this matter. We will update this information in a timely manner.

10 September 2018