

# The 10 Main Holes in the Official Narrative on the Salisbury Poisonings

## #3 – The Capability

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Region: [Europe](#)

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*Once again I return to [Theresa May's statement of 26<sup>th</sup> May](#), in which she stated the following:*

"In conclusion, as I have set out, no other country has a combination of the capability, the intent and the motive to carry out such an act."

She then went on to claim:

"We have been led by evidence not by speculation."

However, as I showed in [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#), her statement to the Commons contained no actual evidence of motive or intent. Claims and assertions, but nothing more.

But what of capability? Looking through the statement, here are the key passages that might be said to fall into this category:

"As I set out for the House in my statements earlier this month, our world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down positively identified the chemical used for this act as a Novichok – a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by the Soviet Union."

"And we have information indicating that within the last decade, Russia has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents probably for assassination – and as part of this programme has produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks."

Her evidence, such that it is, therefore falls into two categories: firstly, capability with regard to the weapon allegedly used to poison the Skripals; secondly, capability with regard to method of delivery of the weapon.

There are three things to say with regard to the first category. To begin with, it is not quite the case that Porton Down scientists had "positively identified the chemical" as a "Novichok". In the evidence presented to the High Court between 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> March, here is how [the Porton Down Chemical and Biological Analyst described the substance](#):

“Blood samples from Sergei Skripal and Yulia Skripal were analysed and the findings indicated exposure to a nerve agent or related compound. The samples tested positive for the presence of a Novichok class nerve agent **or closely related agent**[my emphasis].”

As you will notice, there is a degree of ambiguity in this statement which is not present in Mrs May’s statement made a few days later. Ought she not to have recognised this?

Secondly, it has been conclusively shown that a number of other countries either have produced, or know how to produce substances within the class of nerve agents that Mrs May referred to as “Novichoks”. [The Czech Government has admitted](#) producing a small quantity of the closely related substance, A-230; [Iran](#) has produced it, in compliance with the OPCW in 2016; The German Intelligence Agency, BND, [was given the formula back in the 1990s](#), and they shared it with a number of other NATO countries, including the US and UK. The [Edgewood Chemical and Biological Defense Command in Maryland](#), USA, recorded the formula back in 1998.

The point of this is not to point the finger at any of those countries. Merely to say that knowledge of and production of “Novichok” is by no means confined to one country. And in any case, [according to one of the world’s leading experts in organic chemistry](#), David Collum, Professor of Organic Chemistry at Cornell University, it doesn’t even require a State party. He asserts that “any credible organic chemist could make Novichok nerve agents.”

The fact that other countries know how to produce “Novichoks”, and in some cases have produced it, shows the claim that its apparent use in Salisbury proves Russian culpability to be complete nonsense. It’s as silly as saying that a poisoning using VX points to Britain because VX is a type of nerve agent developed by Britain.

And thirdly, if the British Government did indeed have information that the Russian Government had a secret programme investigating ways of delivering nerve agents, and had produced and stockpiled small quantities of Novichoks, then it had an obligation to inform the OPCW under the Chemical Weapons Convention, which it apparently failed to do. Furthermore, as a State Party to the Convention, it should have raised objections in 2017, when the OPCW’s Director-General, Ahmet Üzümcü, [declared the following](#):

“The completion of the verified destruction of Russia’s chemical weapons programme is a major milestone in the achievement of the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention. I congratulate Russia and I commend all of their experts who were involved for their professionalism and dedication. I also express my appreciation to the States Parties that assisted the Russian Federation with its destruction program and thank the OPCW staff who verified the destruction.”

So much for Mrs May’s evidence of capability regarding the weapon, what of her evidence regarding the delivery?

When she stated that her Government had information that the Russian Government had investigated ways of delivering nerve agents, she was, I believe, referring to the alleged [“assassin’s manual”](#), which the Government says it possesses, but will not show because it is classified, and which apparently contains information showing that Russian agents were

trained in putting poison on door handles.

Three brief points about this:

1. It really is utter nonsense. Smearing poison on a door handle would be a frankly ludicrous way to target someone for assassination, since you could never be sure that your target would actually touch it (you never know, maybe a postman or a milkman or the man from Amazon might get there first).

2. Salisbury was treated to dozens of guys in Hazmat gear decontaminating certain parts of the city, since the substance in question was apparently so lethal that, according to [Alastair Hay, Professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of Leeds](#):

“A few millilitres would be sufficient to probably kill a good number of people.”

Are we really supposed to believe that the Russians have either:

a) Developed ways of putting this stuff on door handles without the requisite chemical protection and perhaps just a pair of Marigolds, or

b) Have people stupid enough to try.

3. But the biggest problem is this: The British Government was starting to pointing the finger at the Russian Government within a few days of the poisoning, and it was later stated that one of the reasons for this was the manual that they apparently possessed. But if they did indeed have this manual, and it was the reason for their apportioning of blame as early as 12th March:

a) Why was the door handle not the focus of the investigation from the very start?

b) When are those police officers who stood within feet of that door, and those who no doubt went in and out of the house using the door handle, going to sue Her Majesty's Government for negligence and their failure to act on the intelligence they apparently had?

If there is indeed such a manual, my guess is that it was put together by a chap named Steele.

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