

The Skripal Affair: Smearing “Evidence” on a Door Handle

By [Craig Murray](#)

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What is left of the government's definitive identification of Russia as the culprit in the Salisbury attack? It is a simple truth that Russia is not the only state that could have made the nerve agent: dozens of them could. It could also have been made by many non-state actors.

Motorola [sales agent](#) Gary Aitkenhead – inexplicably since January, Chief Executive of Porton Down chemical weapons establishment – said in his Sky interview that “probably” only a state actor could create the nerve agent. That is to admit the possibility that a non state actor could. David Collum, Professor of Organo-Chemistry at Cornell University, infinitely more qualified than a Motorola salesman, has stated that his senior students could do it. Professor Collum tweeted me this morning.



Dave Collum
@DavidBCollum

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[@CraigMurrayOrg](#) This nerve agent story has been transparent from the start. Wondering where the rest of the organic chemists have been but, if asked, they would confirm the simplicity of the cmpds and absurdity of the claims.

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The key point in his tweet is, of course “if asked”. The state and corporate media has not asked Prof. Collum nor any of the Professors of Organic Chemistry in the UK. There simply is no basic investigative journalism happening around this case.

So given that the weapon itself is not firm evidence it was Russia that did it, what is Boris Johnson's evidence? It turns out that the British government's evidence is no more than the technique of smearing nerve agent on the door handle. All of the UK media have been briefed by “security sources” that the UK has a copy of a secret Russian assassin training manual detailing how to put nerve agent on door handles, and that given the nerve agent was found on the Skripals door handle, this is the clinching evidence which convinced NATO allies of Russia's guilt.

As the Daily Mirror [reported](#) in direct quotes of the “security source”

"It amounts to Russia's tradecraft manual on applying poison to door handles. It's the smoking gun. It is strong proof that in the last ten years Russia has researched methods to apply poisons, including by using door handles. The significant detail is that these were the facts that helped persuade allies it could only be Russia that did this."

Precisely the same government briefing is published by the Daily Mail in a bigger splash [here](#), and reflected in numerous other mainstream propaganda outlets.

Two questions arise. How credible is the British government's possession of a Russian secret training manual for using novichok agents, and how credible is it that the Skripals were poisoned by their doorknob.

To take the second question first, I see major problems with the notion that the Skripals were poisoned by their doorknob.

The first is this. After what Dame Sally Davis, Chief Medical officer for England, called "rigorous scientific analysis" of the substance used on the Skripals, the government [advised those](#) who may have been in contact to wash their clothes and wipe surfaces with warm water and wet wipes. Suspect locations were hosed down by the fire brigade.

But if the substance was in a form that could be washed away, why was it placed on an external door knob? It was in point of fact raining heavily in Salisbury that day, and indeed had been for some time.

Can somebody explain to me the scenario in which two people both touch the exterior door handle in exiting and closing the door? And if it transferred from one to the other, why did it not also transfer to the doctor who gave extensive aid that brought her in close bodily contact, including with fluids?

The second problem is that the Novichok family of nerve agents are instant acting. There is no such thing as a delayed reaction nerve agent. Remember we have been specifically told by Theresa May that this nerve agent is up to ten times more powerful than VX, the Porton Down developed nerve agent that killed Kim's brother in 15 minutes.

But if it was on the doorknob, the last contact they could possibly have had with the nerve agent was a full three hours before it took effect. Not only that, they were well enough to drive, to walk around a shopping centre, visit a pub, and then – and this is the truly unbelievable bit – their central nervous systems felt in such good fettle, and their digestive systems so in balance, they were able to sit down and eat a full restaurant meal. Only after all that were they – both at precisely the same time despite their substantially different weights – suddenly struck down by the nerve agent, which went from no effects at all, to deadly, on an alarm clock basis.

This narrative simply is not remotely credible. Nerve agents – above all "military grade nerve agents" – were designed as battlefield weapons. They do not leave opponents fighting fit for hours. There is no description in the scientific literature of a nerve agent having this extraordinary time bomb effect. Here another genuine Professor describes their fast action in [Scientific American](#):

Unlike traditional poisons, nerve agents don't need to be added to food and

drink to be effective. They are quite volatile, colourless liquids (except VX, said to resemble engine oil). The concentration in the vapour at room temperature is lethal. The symptoms of poisoning come on quickly, and include chest tightening, difficulty in breathing, and very likely asphyxiation. Associated symptoms include vomiting and massive incontinence. Victims of the Tokyo subway attack were reported to be bringing up blood. Kim Jong-nam died in less than 20 minutes. Eventually, you die either through asphyxiation or cardiac arrest.

If the nerve agent was on the door handle and they touched it, the onset of these symptoms would have occurred before they reached the car. They would certainly have not felt like sitting down to a good lunch two hours later. And they would have been dead three weeks ago. We all pray that Sergei also recovers.

The second part of the extraordinarily happy coincidence of the nerve agent being on the door handle, and the British government having a Russian manual on applying nerve agent to door handles, is whether the manual is real. It strikes me this is improbable – it rings far too much of the kind of intel they had on Iraqi WMD. It also allegedly dates from the last ten years, so Putin's Russia, not the period of chaos, and the FSB is a pretty tight organisation in this period. MI6 penetration is just not that good.

A key question is of course how long the UK has had this manual, and what was its provenance. Another key question is why Britain failed to produce it to the OPCW – and indeed why it does not publish it now, with any identifying marks of the particular copy excluded, given it has widely publicised its existence and possession of it. If Boris Johnson wants to be believed by us, publish the Russian manual.

We also have to consider whether the FSB really publishes its secret assassination techniques in a manual. I attended, as other senior FCO staff, a number of MI6 training courses. One on explosives handling was at Fort Monckton, not too far from Salisbury. One in a very nondescript London office block was on bugging techniques. I recall seeing rigs set up to drill minute holes in walls, turning very slowly indeed. Many hours to get through the wall but almost no noise or vibration. It was where I learnt the government can listen to you through activating the microphone in your mobile phone, even when your phone is switched off. I recall javelin like directional microphones suspended from ceilings to point at distant targets, and a listening device that worked through a beam of infra-red light, but the target could foil by closing the curtains.

The point is that there were of course no manuals for this stuff, no manuals for any other secret MI6 techniques, and these things are not lightly written down.

I would add to this explanation that I lost all faith in the police investigation when it was taken out of the hands of the local police force and given to the highly politicised Metropolitan Police anti-terror squad. I suspect the explanation of the remarkably convenient (but physically impossible) evidence of the door handle method that precisely fits the "Russian manual" may lie there.

These are some of the problems I have with the official account of events. Boris lied about the certainty of the provenance of the nerve agent, and his fall back evidence is at present highly unconvincing. None of which proves it was not the Russian state that was responsible. But there is no convincing proof that it was, and there are several other possibilities. Eventually the glaring problems with the official narrative might be resolved,

but what is plain is that Johnson and May have been premature and grossly irresponsible.

I shall post this evening on Johnson's final claim, that only the Russians had motive.

Update: I have just listened to the released alleged [phone conversation](#) between Yulia Skripal in Salisbury Hospital and her cousin Viktoria, which deepens the mystery further. I should say that in Russian the conversation sounds perfectly natural to me. My concern is after the 30 seconds mark where Viktoria tells Yulia she is applying for a British visa to come and see Yulia.

Yulia replies "nobody will give you a visa". Viktoria then tells Yulia that if she is asked if she wants Viktoria to visit, she should say yes. Yulia's reply to this is along the lines of "that will not happen in this situation", meaning she would not be allowed by the British to see Viktoria. I apologise my Russian is very rusty for a Kremlinbot, and someone might give a better translation, but this key response from Yulia is missing from all the transcripts I have seen.

What is there about Yulia's situation that makes her feel a meeting between her and her cousin will be prevented by the British government? And why would Yulia believe the British government will not give her cousin a visa in the circumstance of these extreme family illnesses?

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