

# Russia Fails to Muster Support for Joint Inquiry Into England Spy Poisoning

By [Reuters](#)

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Main office building of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague  
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Russia's call for a joint inquiry to be held into the poisoning of a former Russian double agent in England failed on Wednesday when it was outvoted 15-6 at a meeting of the global chemical weapons watchdog.

Russia had called an emergency meeting of the decision-making executive of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to counter accusations by Britain that it was behind the March 4 nerve agent poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, England.

U.K.'s security services believe they have pinpointed the location of Russian laboratory that manufactured the nerve agent Novichok used in Salisbury attack, The Times reported on Wednesday. Britain was aware of the existence of the site before March 4, the report said.

It cited an unidentified security source as saying they have a "high degree of confidence in the location".

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Britain's charges of Russian involvement, strongly denied by Moscow, have triggered mass expulsions of diplomats by both Britain's allies in the West, including the United States, and similar retaliatory action by Russia.

When the meeting convened on Wednesday, Russia proposed a joint investigation into the poisoning as it was not invited to participate in an independent probe being carried out by the OPCW at Britain's request, results of which are due next week.

Britain called the Russian proposal for a joint investigation a "perverse" attempt to escape blame for the poisoning of the Skripals, and part of a disinformation campaign mounted by Moscow.

Russia's proposal in the end drew support from China, Azerbaijan, Sudan, Algeria and Iran, a source told Reuters, with U.S. and European members voting against the plan. There were 17 abstentions among members of the organization's 41-member council, only 38 of whose members were present and eligible to vote on Wednesday.

Russia's ambassador to the OPCW, Aleksander Shulgin, confirmed that the vote had been lost.

### **Russia call to Security Council**

Separately on Wednesday, Russia requested a public meeting of the United Nations Security Council on April 5 to discuss the British accusations against Moscow, Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said.

British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson welcomed Russia's defeat.

"Russia has had one goal in mind since the attempted murders on U.K. soil through the use of a military-grade chemical weapon — to obscure the truth and confuse the public," he said in a statement.

"The international community has yet again seen through these tactics and robustly defeated Russia's attempts today to derail the proper international process."

The closed-door OPCW meeting itself triggered sharp verbal exchanges between the Britain and Russia's representatives.

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In a tweet, the British delegation called Moscow's idea for a joint investigation "a

diversionary tactic, and yet more disinformation designed to evade the questions the Russians authorities must answer".

John Foggo, Britain's acting envoy, said Russian assertions that the attack may have been carried out by Britain, the United States or Sweden were "shameless, preposterous statements".

Shulgin, at a news conference, said the vote showed more than half of the OPCW's members had "refused to associate themselves with the West's point of view" — referring to those who voted in favor of Russia's proposal or abstained.

He repeated that Russia had had nothing to do with the attack on the Skripals, which he said looked like "a terrorist attack."

Britain's remarks were "a dirty flow of complete lies ... outright Russia-phobia," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday the OPCW should draw a line under a case that has triggered the worst crisis in East-West relations since the Cold War.

Scientists at the Porton Down biological and chemical weapons laboratory in England have concluded that the toxin was among a category of Soviet-era nerve agents called Novichok, though could not yet determine whether it was made in Russia.

### **Taking samples**

The OPCW, which oversees the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention, has taken samples from the site of the Salisbury attack and is expected to provide results from testing at two designated laboratories next week.

Shulgin said earlier that if Moscow was prevented from taking part in the testing of the Salisbury toxin samples, it would reject the outcome of the OPCW research.

Russia's request to open a parallel, joint Russian-British inquiry has been portrayed by Western powers as an attempt to undermine the investigation by OPCW scientists.

The EU said it was very concerned Moscow was considering rejecting the OPCW findings.

Instead of cooperating with the OPCW, Russia had unleashed "a flood of insinuations targeting EU member states ... This is completely unacceptable," an EU statement read to the council session said.

Skripal, 66, a former Russian military intelligence officer who betrayed scores of Russian agents to Britain and was exchanged in a Russia-West spy swap, remains in a critical but stable condition. His daughter, Yulia, 33, has shown signs of improvement.

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