

The new Salisbury charging decision

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the announcement today by Counter Terrorism Policing that the Crown Prosecution Service has authorised charges against a third individual in relation to the 2018 Salisbury attack – an appalling event which shook the whole country and united our allies in condemnation.

Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the opposition for their courtesy and support in allowing some of their Parliamentary time to be used for this statement and the House will of course understand that this is an ongoing investigation and so we are limited in terms of what can be said about these 3 individuals.

In March 2018, Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia, commonly known as 'Novichok'.

Two police officers from Wiltshire Police involved in searching the victims' home were also poisoned with the same agent.

In July 2018, a further 2 members of the public were found unwell in Amesbury, both of whom had been exposed to Novichok. And tragically, one of them died and this is Dawn Sturgess.

An inquest into her death is ongoing. I know that the thoughts of the whole House will be with the loved ones of Dawn today.

Mr Speaker, This House has profound differences with Russia.

By annexing Crimea in 2014, igniting the flames of conflict in eastern Ukraine and threatening western democracies, including by interfering in their elections, Russia has challenged the fundamental basis of international order.

Although attacks like this are uncommon, this is not the first time Russia has committed a brazen attack in the UK.

Today the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that Russia was responsible for the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko. This supports the findings of the independent Litvinenko Inquiry.

However, as the then-government made clear in 2018 and I reiterate today – we will not tolerate such malign activity here in the UK.

The United Kingdom, under successive governments, has responded with strength and determination,

As my Rt Hon Friend the member for Maidenhead, then Prime Minister, announced in 2018, 250 detectives were involved in the Salisbury murder investigation, working around the clock to discover who was responsible.

On 5 September 2018, the independent Director of Public Prosecutions announced there was sufficient evidence to bring charges against 2 Russian nationals for:

- conspiracy to murder Sergei Skripal
- the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal, Yulia Skripal and Nick Bailey
- causing grievous bodily harm with intent to Yulia Skripal and Nick Bailey
- possession and use of a chemical weapon, contrary to the Chemical Weapons Act 1996

The 2 Russian nationals were known as Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, but the police believed these to be aliases.

The then-Prime Minister announced that the government had concluded the 2 men were members of the Russian Military Intelligence Service, the GRU – and that the operation was almost certainly approved outside the GRU at a senior level of the Russian state.

I want to recognise the exemplary work of our emergency services, our intelligence agencies, armed forces, and law enforcement staff who led the initial response to this despicable attack.

I also pay tribute to the ongoing work to bring the perpetrators of this outrageous attack to justice. We will not let this go.

As Deputy Assistant Commissioner Dean Haydon has said, this investigation has been extraordinarily complex and our country is very fortunate that so many brave people do such outstanding work to keep us safe.

As a result of these efforts, the police can now evidence that Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov are aliases for Alexander Mishkin and Anatoliy Chepiga, and that both are members of the GRU.

The CPS has now authorised charges against a third individual, known as Sergey Fedotov.

The CT Policing investigation identified that Fedotov entered the UK on a flight from Moscow to London Heathrow and stayed at a hotel in central London between the 2nd and 4th of March 2018, before returning to Moscow.

While in the UK, he met with Petrov and Boshirov on more than one occasion in central London.

The CT Policing investigation has established that Fedotov is in fact Denis Sergeev, that he is also a member of the GRU, and that all 3 individuals previously worked together for the GRU as part of additional operations outside Russia.

All 3 men are now wanted by UK police. Arrest warrants are in place for all 3. The police have applied for an Interpol Notice against Fedotov, mirroring those already in place against the other 2 suspects.

Russia has repeatedly refused to allow its nationals to stand trial overseas. This was also the case following the murder of Alexander Litvinenko when a UK extradition request was refused. This has only added to the heartache of those hurt by these attacks and, Mr Speaker, inevitably further damaged our relations with Russia.

As was made clear in 2018, should any of these individuals ever travel outside Russia, we will work with our international partners and take every possible step to detain them and extradite them to face justice.

Mr Speaker, after the attack in Salisbury, my Rt Hon Friends the Members for Maidenhead and Uxbridge and South Ruislip put in place the toughest measures the UK has levied against another state for more than 30 years, comprising of diplomatic, legislative, and economic measures.

We continue to take robust steps to counter the threat posed by the Russian state.

In 2018, 23 undeclared Russian intelligence officers were immediately expelled from the UK. In solidarity, 28 other countries and NATO joined us, resulting in the largest collective expulsion ever – of over 150 Russian intelligence officers.

This fundamentally degraded Russian intelligence capability for years to come.

The government will continue to provide the security services and law enforcement agencies with all the additional tools they need to deal with the full range of state threats, which continue to evolve.

In direct response to the Salisbury attack, we introduced new powers to enable the police to stop, question, search, and detain individuals at the UK border to determine whether they are a spy or otherwise involved in hostile activity.

These vital powers are already helping the security services and law enforcement agencies to protect the UK from very real and serious threat posed by states who seek to undermine and destabilise our country.

In July 2020, we published a full and comprehensive response to Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee's Russia report. This addressed point by point all the key themes and recommendations raised by the Committee.

But we are going even further and have committed to introducing new legislation to counter state threats to protect the United Kingdom.

Earlier this summer, we held a public consultation on the government's proposals, to improve our ability to detect, respond to, and prevent state threats, keep our citizens safe, and protect sensitive data and intellectual property.

Responses to that consultation are currently being considered and we will return with comprehensive legislation.

Another crucial strand of this work is combatting illicit finance. Squeezing out the dirty money and money launderers out of the UK to secure our global prosperity is our priority.

We are at the forefront of the international fight against illicit finance, combatting the threat from source to destination.

We have introduced a new Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime and a Global Anti-Corruption Sanctions Regime.

The National Crime Agency continues to lead UK effort to bring the full power of law enforcement to bear against serious criminals, corrupt elites, and their assets, including through increased checks on private flights, customs, and freight travel.

In July and September 2020, working in tandem with the EU, we announced sanctions against the Russian Intelligence Services for cyberattacks against the UK and her allies.

We have also taken robust action in response to the poisoning and attempted murder of Alexei Navalny – enforcing asset freezes and travel bans against 13 individuals and a Russian research institute involved in the case.

The government will continue to respond extremely robustly to the enduring and significant threat from the Russian state.

We continue to make huge strides to counter this threat and to increase our resilience and that of our allies to Russian malign activity.

Mr Speaker, we respect the people of Russia, but we will do whatever it takes, everything it takes, to keep our country safe. We will actively work to deter and defend against the full spectrum of threats emanating from Russia until relations with its government improve.

Mr Speaker, I would like to end by paying tribute to the resilience of the people of Salisbury, who suffered a sickening and despicable act in their community, and to the people of Amesbury, who lost one of their own in the most dreadful of circumstances.

Our government will be relentless in our pursuit of justice for the victims of these attacks and continue to do whatever is necessary to keep our people safe.

I commend this statement to the House.