



Strengthening the norms against
chemical and biological weapons



Muddied Waters from Moscow to The Hague – Russian Misinformation Practices at the Institution Prohibiting Chemical Weapons

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Outline

This Contribution will:

- Present how Russia levels accusations on chemical weapons
- Show how similar patterns were employed in the past.
- Point out how this might change and weaken the (European) security architecture
- Mention steps that (European) states are already taking to address this issue and add potential ways of how to engage further.

This contribution will not test the veracity of Russian accusations. The majority of claims have been repeatedly debunked by several reports of international organizations.

Accusations on Chemical Weapons Use in Ukraine

Exchange of Verbal Notes (diplomatic correspondences) to the OPCW



OPCW: Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

OPCW 2022 Compendium:
<https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022/Compendium%20of%20correspondence%20shared%20by%20States%20Parties%20on%20Ukraine.pdf>

Pattern 1:
Accusing Ukraine of “chemical provocations” in the future

→ mainly exploding chemical storage tanks

Notes: 5, 17, 23, 28, 29, 33, 34, 37, 38

Pattern 2:
Attributing chemical instances in the past to Ukrainian “provocations”

→ mainly instances where other sources claim Russian shelling caused the release of chemicals

Notes: 18, 19, 26, 39

Pattern 3:
Accusing other actors of supporting Ukraine in “chemical provocations” and misinformation

Notes: 5 (USA), 17 (UK and USA), 27 (UK), 29 (OPCW)

Similar Patterns of Misinformation in Past Incidents

Approaches	Syria (Khan Shaykhun)	Salisbury	Navalny	Ukraine
1. Flooding the Space with Accusations	Accusations against opposition forces and white helmets (<i>OPCW EC-M-54/NAT.13</i>)	Claim that there is no evidence linking Russia (<i>OPCW EC-87/NAT.9</i>) + other states responsible ("false flag" allegations against the UK)	Accusations Germany violates CWC + Navalny was poisoned by UK agents	Pattern 1 + 2 + 3 <i>(concerning UK and US allegations)</i>
2. Discrediting Investigation	Criticism of OPCW Fact Finding Mission's methodology + proposal for new investigation	Reinterpretation of the OPCW's Technical Secretariat (TS) report, claim this found no evidence (<i>OPCW EC-M-59/NAT.3</i>)	Russian invitation of the OPCW TS but no follow up to facilitate this + criticism of the TS Report on its mission to Germany	Pattern 2 <i>could become precursor</i>
3. Attacking the Institution	Statements by Lavrov discrediting the OPCW itself + veto against the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism + not accepting the Investigation and Identification Team as legitimate	Cyber attacks against the OPCW and its laboratories	<i>No explicit attack in this context yet.</i>	Pattern 3

How do Accusations Influence the (European) Security Architecture?

1. Trust in the OPCW

- Allegations against OPCW staff
- Discrediting and thereby rendering less credible investigative mechanisms

2. Cooperation and Preparedness

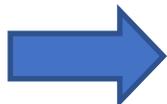
- OPCW TS support missions attacked, criticized and used as political pawns
- Preparedness exercises are presented as evidence for planned false flag attacks (*OPCW Note Verbale 33*)

3. Ability to React

- Muddying the water creates crucial moment of doubt and inaction (see Syria)
- Pretext for preventing more forceful investigative mechanisms

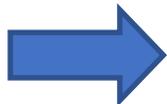
How can (European) States React to Russian Disinformation on Chemical Weapons?

Voice Counter Narratives



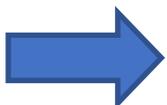
- Verbal Notes (*UK No. 63*) and statements (*Germany on behalf of 49 states at 99th Session of Executive Council*) at OPCW
- EUvsDisinfo
- Publish Reports and push for less ambiguous language

Support and Advance Existing Structures



- Continue to request Technical Assistance by OPCW TS
- Support of OPCW activities in Ukraine in line with Article X CWC
- Push to set up long term investigative mechanisms

Clarify the Applicable International Law Norms



- Clarify the role of attacks on industrial chemical facilities under the CWC and international humanitarian law
- Advise Ukraine to not use inadequate legal language

*Working together to strengthen
the norms against chemical and
biological weapons.*

**Thank you for your
attention.**

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