

Bothered By Midgies 385

15 Mar, 2018 in *Uncategorized* by *craig*

In 13 years of running my blog I have never been exposed to such a tirade of abuse as I have for refusing to accept without evidence that Russia is the only possible culprit for the Salisbury attack. The abuse has mostly been on twitter, and much of the most venomous stuff has come from corporate and state media “journalists”. I suppose I am a standing rebuke to them for merely being stenographers to power and never doing any actual research, but that hardly explains the visceral levels of hatred exhibited.

Today they are all terrifically happy and sharing amongst themselves a lengthy twitter thread by a Blairite and chemist called Clyde Davis in which they all say I am “owned” and my article disproven. There are two remarkable things about this thread.

The first remarkable thing is the remarkably high percentage of those who are sharing it with commendations who are mainstream media journalists. Last I saw was George Monbiot five minutes ago, but there are dozens. I suppose it is important to them as validating their decision to support uncritically the government line without doing any actual journalism.

The second remarkable thing is that the thread they are all sharing misses out almost all my side of the conversation. An objective observer might think that made it hard to say who “won” the argument. To be fair, that is probably not deliberate but appears to be a result of how twitter does threading. Here I reconstruct by paste the thread with my responses. It may give a better idea of whether Mr Davis completely “destroys” my article, as the “professional” journalists are all claiming. And as Mr Davies is critiquing my article, perhaps you might refresh yourself on that first [here](#).



Corbynsupporters50+ @corbyn50plus · 15h

The Novichok Story Is Indeed Another Iraqi WMD Scam:

craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2018/... - via: @CraigMurrayOrg



The Novichok Story Is Indeed Another Iraqi WMD S...

As recently as 2016 Dr Robin Black, Head of the Detection Laboratory at the UK's only chemical weapons facility at Porton Down, a former colleague of Dr David

craigmurray.org.uk

Like

11 25 20



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 14h

"Yet now, the British Government is claiming to be able instantly to identify a substance which its only biological weapons research centre has never seen before and was unsure of its existence. "

You wouldn't recognise a mass spectrometer if it hit you smack in your stupid gob.

16 70 211



Craig Murray @CraigMurrayOrg · 14h

And how does the mass spectrometer tell you the sample was made in Russia if you don't have an example of a Russian made one to compare? I shall listen to your reply with genuine interest, despite your completely unprovoked aggression.

7 9 14



Clyde Davies

@deadlyvices

Follow

Replying to @CraigMurrayOrg @corbyn50plus

So now you're going to lecture me on chemistry? This ought to be interesting. Let me give you some background to all of this. When I heard who the victim was, and that it was a nerve agent, I immediately suspected what the chemical formula was likely to be 1/

6:32 AM - 15 Mar 2018

153 Retweets 308 Likes



41 153 308

Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 5h

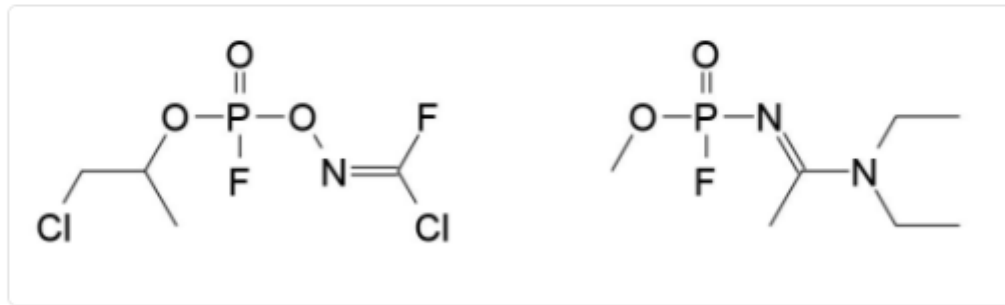
Replying to @deadlyvices @CraigMurrayOrg @corbyn50plus

This is because I knew about the 'novichok' agents. They were developed in the 70s and 80s by Vil Mirzayanov among others, who now lives as an exile in the US. He was so horrified that he went public and eventually to jail in Russia 2/

1 22 93

Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 5h

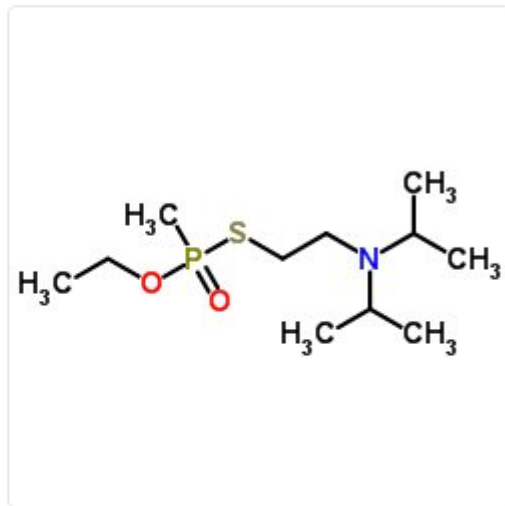
'Novichok' however is a generic term given to a family of organophosphorus acetylcholinesterase inhibitors. They look like this. The structure on the right is A-232 3/



4 18 87

Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 5h

VX in comparison looks like this. It has a different chemical structure. Just by looking at the structure, a chemist can tell you what the mass, infrared, NMR, UV and other spectra are likely to look like with a high degree of confidence 4/



3 13 77

Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 5h

This is because chemistry is a *science*, and sciences differentiate themselves from other kinds of discipline by allowing people to make *testable predictions*. It's a branch of *inductive reasoning*. 5/

4 23 182



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h

These look like simple chemical compounds but in reality they are difficult to make *safely*. One tiny drop, about the size of a pinhead, of VX is enough to kill a healthy adult. These compounds are reputedly ten times more deadly 6/

10 32 175



Craig Murray ✓

@CraigMurrayOrg

Replying to @deadlyvices @corbyn50plus

1/2 Did you actually read my article? Both Porton Down and the OPCW published their doubt they were ever really synthesised. Nobody had ever seen one. And as you say, the alleged formula was revealed two decades ago by the scientist who worked on them and now lives in the USA.

6:51 AM - 15 Mar 2018

1 Retweet



1 1



Tweet your reply



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 6h

Replying to @CraigMurrayOrg @corbyn50plus

Yes. I read your article. Porton Down and the OPCW have no doubt *changed their opinion*. That's the beauty of science: when the *evidence* changes you get to change your mind.

1

Neither my reply nor Davies' rejoinder are included in the thread which the mainstream "journalists" are circulating. Note that Davies responds to being challenged, with a riposte which is untrue. The OPCW have never changed their position on the physical existence of "novichoks" from the position I gave and referenced in my article. By contrast, Mr Davies gives no reference for his claim the OPCW has changed its mind. Personally I find it problematic that somebody like Mr Davies who blusters so loud on scientific method, responds to a challenge to his position with an apparent invention.

It is indeed true that Porton Down (which here means the British government), however, have changed their position since 2016 when, as I again demonstrated in my article with references, they said there was no evidence for the physical existence of "novichoks". Now apparently they have said not only do they have one,

but it is indubitably Russian. If a “novichok” is indeed in the possession of Porton Down, of course scientists, like diplomats and the others involved, will change their position on the existence of Novichoks. As will I. But that, in any sense, that will prove it is of Russian manufacture is a totally different question.



Craig Murray

@CraigMurrayOrg



Replying to [@deadlyvices](#) [@corbyn50plus](#)

2/2 Therefore if the compound does correspond to a "Novichok" there is zero evidence it was created in Russia - no Russian sample it can be compared to. It will be the first time the OPCW has ever seen one.

6:55 AM - 15 Mar 2018

2 Retweets



1



2





Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h

Therefore anybody undertaking to make them has to take extreme precautions. If you just wanted to *kill* someone because you wanted them out of the way, why not shoot them? 7/

4 36 200



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h

And unless you were a state, with the access to the kind of facilities this kind of chemistry would demand, why would you want to take the risks associated? Unless of course you wanted to leave an unmistakable and brutal calling card 8/

5 50 282



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h

The Russians have proven past form with these compounds. Then we can triangulate the motive and opportunity against the means. The motive was to send a clear message to Russians at home that opposing Putin was high risk 9/

10 50 259



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h

And to the UK that this little country, with post-imperial delusions of adequacy, was increasingly isolating itself globally by leaving the EU and could likely not call on the US for any meaningful help 10/

11 69 331



Craig Murray @CraigMurrayOrg

Replying to @deadlyvices @corbyn50plus

I find most amusing right wing nutters like yourself who start off "you are not a scientist: I am a scientist. Therefore only I am qualified to comment on this" and then go on to give us your childish views on international diplomacy.

6:57 AM - 15 Mar 2018

1 Like



7 1



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



Your entire article is riddled with ridiculous claims. One of the most egregious is 'It is a scientific impossibility for Porton Down to have been able to test for Russian novichoks if they have never possessed a Russian sample to compare them to.' 11/

3 56 300



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



This is plainly **bollocks**. **All** molecules with the same formula have **exactly** the same properties and will exhibit the same characteristics as any other. Motive, opportunity and the particularly brutal and calculated means all point to Russia. 12/

14 51 400



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



And this other statement "If they exist at all, Novichoks were allegedly designed to be able to be made at bench level in any commercial chemical facility." Really? **All** of them? **Some** might have binary precursors, but even those are pretty vile in their own right 13/

2 25 189



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



Take sarin for example, which uses methyl phosphonyl difluoride as a binary precursor. This is an extremely unpleasant chemical and the reaction produces HF, which is a dangerous and corrosive byproduct 14/

4 26 172



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



Both those novichok structures would use very similar precursors and produce the **same** byproducts. The idea of some foreign assassin mixing up the ingredients in a hotel bedroom is risible 15/

4 33 202



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



Motive, means, opportunity: the essential components of any murder case. I've explained the means **ad nauseam** by now. The motive - especially given the victims - and opportunity, triangulate very well to the Russians 16/

7 31 195



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



In my book, if something looks like a duck, swims and flies like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a bloody duck. Why in God's name some people have to argue the essential duckiness of a duck is utterly baffling 17/.

60 97 795



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h

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60 97 795



Craig Murray ✓

@CraigMurrayOrg



Replying to @deadlyvices @corbyn50plus

Would't the world be a lovely place if everyone just fell in with your right wing world view. And for somebody who lectures so insistently on scientific logic, you are peculiarly unaware of Karl Popper's swans.

7:22 AM - 15 Mar 2018

6 Retweets 13 Likes



56

6

13



Tweet your reply



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 7h



Replying to @CraigMurrayOrg @corbyn50plus

I'm not right-wing, you fool. I've voted Labour for the past thirty five years of my life, well before Corbyn arrived on the scene and hopefully well after he's gone. Now, if you wish to play the ball instead of the man, I'd like to hear your counter arguments

15

27

470



Then along came the man who really did put me to shame. A Mr Kevin Smyth who completely demolished Davis with a simple polite question:



KevinSmyth @KevinSmyth · 2h



Replying to @deadlyvices @CraigMurrayOrg @corbyn50plus

Clyde, can it be proven beyond doubt this was made in Russia - my understanding is whilst developed by Russia it can theoretically be made anywhere?

5

3

7



Clyde Davies @deadlyvices · 1h



No it can't be proven beyond doubt purely on Chemistry but the *balance of probabilities* is heavily skewed towards Russia. And until I hear a more convincing alternative explanation I'm sticking to my guns.

16

10

68



That part of the exchange is also missing from the thread being circulated so gleefully at the moment.

So what does Davies tell us in this article delivered by twitter which “demolishes” my article.

- 1) **Davies acknowledges that until recently Porton Down and OPCW doubted the physical existence of “novichoks”. He says they have now changed their minds.** [Porton Down has indeed undergone a remarkable change of mind in the last week , but the OPCW has yet to see the evidence].
- 2) **Davis states that chemists can tell if a compound corresponds to one of the “novichoks” described by Mirzayanov, but Davis specifically accepts that does not prove Russian manufacture.**
- 3) **Davis nevertheless states strongly it is Russia because he believes Russia has form and motive.**

Nothing here can remotely be said to be conclusive. The question that puzzles me, is why are so many mainstream media journalists gleefully seizing on this series of tweets as a destruction of the need for sceptical inquiry? A possible answer:

- 1) Davies by claiming credentials as a chemist conforms to the corporate media urge for an appeal to authority. He validates the government line and he is a *chemist*. He can throw in the names of chemicals and molecular diagrams. That kind of thing impresses journalists. That he explicitly admits the chemistry cannot prove Russia did it, is apparently irrelevant.
- 2) Davies thus provides a smokescreen of respectability by which they can continue to advance their careers by cutting and pasting the government line without question.

In fact, all of Davies’ “chemistry” in this exchange sets out to prove something which was never disputed – that chemists are able to identify whether or not a substance is one of the “novichok” compounds described by Mirzayanov. But as he published the formulae two decades ago, and has been living in the USA, and as the US dismantled and studied the Nukus plant, and as Porton Down had never seen any evidence the Russians actually succeeded in synthesising “novichoks, this in no way adds up to evidence of Russian manufacture. As Davies, to his credit, finally acknowledged when confronted by an interlocutor for whom he did not have automatic hatred.

I can’t say the midgies bother me that much. But they are interesting to study.