

British Court Quashes Decision Not to Hold Litvinenko Inquiry

By [The Moscow Times](#)

February 11, 2014

The  **Moscow Times**

LONDON — The High Court has quashed a decision by the British government not to hold a public inquiry into the murder of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko, who died in London in 2006 after being poisoned with a radioactive substance.

Tuesday's judgment means the government will have to reconsider the decision, a diplomatically sensitive one as a public inquiry could delve into the issue of whether Russia was involved in the killing. Moscow denies any involvement.

Litvinenko, 43, died after drinking tea poisoned with a rare radioactive isotope, polonium-210, in a plush hotel. From his deathbed he accused President Vladimir Putin of ordering his murder, a charge the Kremlin has rejected.

The High Court stopped short of calling for an inquiry actually to take place, but said that Home Secretary Theresa May, the interior minister who refused to hold a public inquiry,

would have to revisit the issue.

"If she is to maintain her refusal, she will need better reasons than those given in the decision letter," wrote Lord Justice Richards, handing down the unanimous judgment of the three High Court justices who considered the issue.

"The case for setting up an immediate statutory inquiry as requested by the Coroner is plainly a strong one."

Robert Owen, the coroner in charge of the inquest into Litvinenko's death, had requested an inquiry, stating that he was not able to address the issue of Russia's alleged involvement. His request was turned down last July.

An inquest, a British legal process that takes place in cases of violent or unnatural deaths, is separate from any public inquiry, and Owen had said his examination of any Russian complicity would be flawed because he could not consider secret evidence held by the British government.

In a formal submission to the High Court, he had written that this material "does establish a prima facie case as to the culpability of the Russian state in the death of Alexander Litvinenko."

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