

Russian disinformation related to biological weapons, 1998-2021

Appendix to Milton Leitenberg, "False allegations of biological-weapons from Putin's Russia," *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 27, Nos. 4-6 (2020).

This appendix contains a detailed chronology from 1998 to mid-2021 of disinformation related to biological weapons (BW) emanating from Russian government agencies or their proxies: senior officials in the Russian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense; public-health agencies; and a multitude of media platforms, including many evidently established for this purpose by Russian intelligence agencies. These false allegations include claims that the United States had maintained an offensive BW program, carried out in laboratories all over the world, but particularly in facilities established in former Soviet states surrounding Russia, notably Georgia, and that from these locations the United States was actively attacking Russia with a long list of pathogens. All of these allegations are false, and there can be little question that the Russian government knows that they are false. Most of these facilities had been connected to the Soviet offensive BW program, and were later converted with the support of the Nunn-Lugar program to serve as central public-health laboratories, analogous to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States.

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Beginning in 1998, a second phase of the renewed Russian BW disinformation began. Senior Russian military officials who had been directly responsible for Russia's own offensive biological and chemical weapons programs took it upon themselves to resurrect many of the old Soviet-era disinformation stories that had not been heard of for more than a decade, and in some cases not since the 1950s. In a press interview in March 1998, Lieutenant General Valentin Yevstigneev, who had headed the 15th Directorate of the General Staff/USSR Ministry of Defense responsible for the USSR's BW program until 1992, and who until the end of 2000 headed a renamed but otherwise little altered body, resurrected the charge "that AIDS was created in a military laboratory abroad."¹ In a second interview, in 1999, in an academic Russian arms-control journal, Yevstigneev suggested that the "mass emergence of Colorado beetles in Russia, is due to foreign delivery." Amazingly, Yevstigneev resurrected this old canard from the GDR and Polish propaganda campaigns of the 1950s. He did this despite the fact that after 1990

¹ Sergei Gerasimenko, "Everything That They Are Saying About Us Is a Lie," *New Izvestia*, March 3, 1998.

the potato beetle disinformation had been publicly ridiculed by those countries.² Even in late 2001, Yevstigneev was still repeating the potato beetle story: “We are suspicious about mass emergence of Colorado beetles in Russia, known for damaging potatoes.”³ In 1998, Lieutenant General Stanislav V. Petrov, head of all Russian Army chemical and biological troops, resurrected the charge that the United States had “experimented with” biological weapons during the Korean War. The Moscow NTV correspondent, Maryana Maksimovskaya, helped him along by adding that “the Americans blundered two years ago” when there was a hantavirus disease outbreak “near the Dugway test site in the USA where chemical and biological weapons used to be tested.” She also pointed out, falsely, that hantaviruses and the Ebola virus “are very similar... This made biologists suspect that the Ebola virus... is not natural.”⁴

In a peculiar evolution, a book published in 2005 by Alexander Kouzminov, a former Soviet KGB agent who had emigrated from Russia to New Zealand, continued this tradition. According to the author, “almost every outbreak of a new or emerging infectious disease in the past 15 years – including the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Britain in 2001 and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) pandemic in 2003 – may have been either a deliberate bioweapons attack or an accidental release of a genetically engineered microbe from a bioweapons facility.” He also implied that “the causative agents of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome were genetically engineered specifically to attack Native Americans.”⁵ These claims were in perfect alignment with past Soviet and Russian BW disinformation and similar examples that would follow in subsequent years.

² Dmitry Litovkin, “Interview; Valentin Yevstigneev on Issues Relating to Russian Biological Weapons,” *Yaderny Kontrol* [Nuclear Control], no. 11 (Summer 1999), pp. 43–51 in the English-language edition; pp. 15–25 in the Russian-language edition.

³ Interview with General Valentin Yevstigneev, “Biological Weapons Are the Cheapest Kind of WMD: An Interview,” [in Russian], Moscow, November 26, 2001.

⁴ BBC SWB [Summary of the World Broadcasts], “Russia: Military Bacteriological Centre Short of Funds, (Transmission of Moscow NTV, November 22, 1995),” November 27, 1995.

⁵ Jens H. Kuhn et al., “Russia’s Secret Weapons,” a review of *Biological Espionage: Special Operations of the Soviet and Russian Foreign Intelligence Services in the West*, by Alexander Kouzminov, *Nature* no. 436 (August 4, 2005), pp. 628–29. At the time of publication of his book, Kouzminov was employed by a New Zealand government agency concerned with environmental affairs.

2003

The outbreak of the first SARS pandemic in China in 2002-2003 afforded the context in which three Russian public figures, two of them scientists and one a politician, spread disinformation. The first was Dr. Sergei Kolesnikov, a member of the Russian Academy of Medicine, who stated that the SARS virus was “an atypical pneumonia... a synthesis of the viruses of measles and infectious parotiditis or mumps, the natural composition of which is impossible. This can be done only in a laboratory... .” He believed that it had been made as part of creating a biological weapon, and he could not “rule out that the virus could have spread accidentally as a result of ‘an unsanctioned leakage’ from a biological weapons laboratory.”⁶ Kolesnikov’s remarks are absurd. Both measles and mumps viruses are negative-sense RNA viruses with zero genetic relationship to SARS-CoV, which is in a different viral phylum. Kolesnikov, an embryologist, clearly had no understanding of virology. On the very next day, Dr. Nikolai Filatov expressed a similar opinion, that the SARS virus was “man made, because there is no vaccine for this virus, its make up is unclear.”⁷ Filatov, an epidemiologist, is the deputy director of the Mechnikov Institute of Vaccines and Sera in Moscow, but was equally ignorant about virology.

Nevertheless, Kolesnikov expanded his remarks a month later speaking at a press conference in Moscow: “this is one of the ‘candidate viruses’ – a biological weapon, which was developed taking into account the physiological characteristics of a particular race.”⁸ This time Kolesnikov was seconded by Alexander Vengerovsky, former vice-speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Vengerovsky claimed he had

information that in the early 40s of the last century, developments on racial biological weapons were shipped from Germany to the United States - then the so-called “northern man gene” was developed. In 1964, the first death from SARS was recorded in northern Mexico. Later, the virus may have been “corrected” for Asians. And now, when the

⁶ “SARS virus was created in weapons lab: Russian scientist,” April 11, 2003, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2003/apr/11sars3.htm>.

⁷ “SARS could be biological weapon: experts,” *Gazeta Daily*, April 11, 2003.

⁸ Alexandra Mayantseva, “Is SARS a new biological weapon”?, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 14, 2003.

Chinese economy got stronger, and its currency seriously announced to the world its views on the dollar, the creators of the virus released the “genie” from the bottle⁹

Every word of Vengerovsky’s “information” is a fanciful fabrication. The concoctions of all three of these individuals were presumably their own inventions and not parroting material provided to them by Russian intelligence agencies.

March 16, 2006

Gennady Zyuganov, the head of the Russian Communist Party, suggested that “the outbreak of bird flu in a number of European countries, including Russia, is a plot by the United States... . Asked whether he believes the bird flu outbreak could be a deliberate attack by the United States, Zyuganov said: ‘I not only suggest this, I know very well how this can be arranged. There is nothing strange here.’”¹⁰ Zyuganov did not explain why the US should have attacked other European countries in addition to Russia with bird flu. Zyuganov was presumably again speaking for himself.

2007

In May 2007, the head of the Russian Federal Security Service (the FSB, the successor to the KGB), Nikolai Patrushev, reportedly presented a report to President Putin suggesting that “several large Western medical centers...[are] involved in the development of ‘genetically engineered biological weapons’ for use against the Russian population.” The FSB report apparently named the Harvard School of Public Health, the American International Health Alliance, the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the US Department of Justice, the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, the Swedish Agency for International Development, and the Indian Genome Institute as being “involved” in such BW developments aimed at the Soviet Union.¹¹ A few months later, however, when the head of Russia’s Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Defence Troops, Colonel-General Vladimir I. Filippov, was asked whether any

⁹ Ibid..

¹⁰ “Communist Blames US for Bird Flu,” March 16, 2006, <www.freemarketnews.com/WorldNews.asp?nid=9592>.

¹¹ Dmitry Butrin et al., “Russia Warily Eyes Human Samples: In the Name of Fighting Bioterrorism. Export of Biological Materials Prohibited” [in Russian], *Kommersant*, May 30, 2007.

states were currently developing biological weapons, he replied, “At the current time there is no available official evidence that any country is developing biological weapons.”¹² Filippov’s comment demonstrated clear differences in the statements made during the early Putin years by serving senior military figures directly responsible for CBW issues in Russia versus those made by their retired predecessors such as Yevstigneev, Petrov, Burgasov, and the FSB. Patrushev would continue to accuse the US repeatedly of BW activities through 2021.

2009

The Putin administration founded the Russian news outlet *Russia Today* in 2005. In 2008, it was renamed *RT*. The H1N1 influenza pandemic started in early 2009 and *RT* featured a US conspiracy theorist, Wayne Madsen, in multiple programs claiming that the virus had been engineered at the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID). YouTube videos produced by *RT* reportedly averaged one million views per day, “the highest among news outlets ‘according to a US intelligence report’.”¹³

May 15, 2009

Pravda carried an interview with a “doctor and a political scientist” who is asked how swine flu appeared, and he replies, “I believe there was a leak from laboratories where biological weapons were developed.” When asked “In which country can swine flu labs be located?” he replies, “They could most likely be located in Mexico where the CIA might be conducting its secret experiments. Mexico belongs to the group of Latin American states where many secret laboratories always existed. ... In the depths of the forest, there were thousands of laboratories.” He offered that “about 30 or 40” people might work “in one such laboratory,” which would make a covert work force of 30,000-40,000 in Mexico alone. The FSB officer in Directorate A who presumably concocted this fantastical story perhaps had in mind an image of the “thousands” of cocaine refining sites in the jungles of Peru and Colombia. The “doctor and political scientist”

¹² *Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 13, 2007, <www.redstar.ru/2007/11/13_11/1_02.html>.

¹³ William J. Broad, “Putin’s Long War June 16on American Science,” *New York Times*, April 14, 2020, <www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/science/putin-russia-disinformation-health-coronavirus.html>.

ended by saying “Many of them [the laboratories] have become hotels now—I lived in one.” Presumably not the one that produced the swine flu that escaped.¹⁴

December 3, 2009, *Pravda*

This press item served as the initiation of charges targeting Georgia and the Lugar Center that the United States built under the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program. Hundreds more would follow. Its primary allegation was that “biological weapons are being secretly developed on Georgian territory,” and also referred to “the ‘plague project’ in Georgia.” The *Pravda* article contained no fewer than nine discrete false allegations and ended with the incredible charge “It is believed that the Americans are trying to deliver the specimens of biological weapons that have been obtained [in Georgia] to Iran.”¹⁵

March 27, 2011

A story by a Georgian journalist, Joni Simonishvili, in *Geonews*, a Russian proxy disinformation site, turned to the Lugar Center in earnest.¹⁶ It noted the official opening of the “Central Public Health Reference Laboratory in Tbilisi Georgia, ... on 18 March 2011.” The article then states that “locals and other[s] consider the impressive facility to be a bio-weapons lab that has been strategically located near the Tbilisi International airport for quick deployment.” It quotes the official statement that the purpose of the facility is to “promote public and animal health through infectious disease detection and epidemiological surveillance,” but says that “such a statement of its ‘real purpose’ is...what can be best described as a flat out lie, and pulling the wool over the eyes of Georgian and American taxpayers. In reality it was ‘a flimsy disguised bio weapons facility’.” The author also connects the Bechtel Corporation, one of the contractors for the construction or conversion of several Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA)-supported facilities in Georgia, to its alleged role in selling “a cocktail of poisonous chemicals to Iraq in the 1980s which were gas the Kurds” [sic].

¹⁴ “World Stands on the Brink of Biological War,” *Pravda*, May 14, 2009, www.pravdareport.com/world/107555-biological_war/.

¹⁵ Igor Makarov, “A Biological Bomb at Our Borders: Dangerous Experiments in Secret Georgian Laboratories Equipped by American Specialists,” *Pravda*, December 3, 2009.

¹⁶ Joni Simonishvili, “BioWeapons/Reference Lab in Tbilisi, Georgia, Bechtel Secret Ops!!!,” *Geonews*, March 27, 2011, <<https://jonis-geonews.livejournal.com/38424.html>>.

The article continues for three single-spaced pages which includes a long section accurately describing the role of the former Soviet system of anti-plague facilities in Georgia in contributing to the offensive Soviet BW program prior to 1992.¹⁷ It is very likely in this context that the Georgian journalist misquotes Senator Richard Lugar as referring to the facility as “a storage facility for biological weapons.” Lugar would have unquestionably been referring to the site in its Soviet incarnation before 1992, and not in 2011. The author incongruously ends this particular section of his article with the following lines: “Many locals are convinced that the Americans will develop biological weapons and hide it behind a façade of inconspicuous research; they remember well that this was how the Soviet Union did it.”

April 9, 2012

Dr. Gennady Onishchenko makes his debut in the first of a long series of his false allegations over the next six years directed at the Lugar Center. Onishchenko had been a health ministry bureaucrat during the Soviet years and was appointed chief sanitary inspector of Russia by Boris Yeltsin in 1996. In 2005, he was also appointed director of *Rospotrebnadzor*, the Russian Federal Service for the Oversight of Consumer Protection and Welfare. In the early 2000s, he coauthored several papers on the threat of bioterrorism to Russia. Now he alleged that Georgia had introduced the African Swine Fever virus (ASFV) into southern Russia as an act of “economic subversion.” “ASFV came to us from Georgia. It first appeared in Ossetia, and then spread to the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories. [The outbreak] shows signs of being an artificially created situation. This is an act of economic subversion that the Krasnodar Territory has been unable to tackle for three years.” However, the same *RIA Novosti* story reported that the ASF virus was detected in 254 locations in twenty-four Russian regions, and that more than 440,000 pigs had to be culled.¹⁸

July 19, 2013

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the US Department of State’s annual non-compliance statement, particularly the section on Russian presumptive noncompliance with the BWC. It leveled accusations of its own, and added an obvious reference to the US CTR

¹⁷ Raymond Zilinskas, “The Anti-Plague System and the Soviet Biological Warfare Program,” *Critical Reviews in Microbiology* 32 (2006), pp. 48–64.

¹⁸ “Georgia Blamed for Swine Fever in Russia,” *RIA Novosti*, April 9, 2012.

conversion of former Soviet BW-related laboratories in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), that “Biological operations of the U.S. Dept. of Defense near the Russian borders are a source of very serious concerns as well.”¹⁹

The United States and Russia initially signed the Memorandum of Understanding, known as the Umbrella Agreement, that governed implementation of CTR projects in 1992. This agreement had an initial seven-year duration and was renewed in 1999 and 2006. It expired in June 2013. The United States and Russia then replaced it with a bilateral protocol under the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Program in the Russian Federation Agreement (MNEPR). Russia’s Ministry of Defense will no longer participate in these cooperative programs. As a result, many of the CTR projects in Russia will wind down, although the two countries will continue to cooperate on some areas of nuclear security. The United States will also continue to fund cooperative engagement programs in countries around the world.²⁰

In the US Fiscal Year 2014 CTR budget request, biological weapons engagement programs still accounted for nearly 60 percent of the budget.

In addition to these sums, the United States spent approximately \$2.2 billion successively under the Biological Weapons Proliferation Prevention (BWPP) program, the Biological Threat Reduction (BTRP) program and finally the Cooperative Biological Engagement program to convert the former Soviet BW facilities in CIS states as well as inside Russia from Fiscal Year 1988 to Fiscal Year 2015.²¹

July 20, 2013

The following day, a Russian press outlet interviewed two commentators to embellish on the Foreign Ministry’s release and to turn its focus directly once again to Georgia. Colonel Anatoly Tsyganok, head of the Russian MOD’s Military Forecasting Center, said: “The Americans did indeed deploy three biological weapons laboratories in Georgia. Previously they opened a similar

¹⁹ “Moscow suggests US State Dept report authors ‘look in the mirror,’” Interfax-AVN Online, July 19, 2013

²⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Arms Control and Nonproliferation: A Catalog of Treaties and Agreements*, RL 33865, Updated March 18, 2019.

²¹ The estimate is based on an aggregation of figures tabulated by the National Academy of Sciences, as well as other sources. Personal communication, February 20, 2020.

laboratory in Africa, right after they announced that they would not be engaged in improving biological weapons.” The article went on to quote Onishchenko about ASF coming from Georgia, and added “Pig plague is a well-known biological weapon. Let me remind you, 15 years ago, Americans infected Cuba with swine plague. The Cubans had very big problems from this” Tsyganok added a preposterous statement about the US role in Russian chemical demilitarization: “the Americans practically did not give money and in fact disrupted their obligations.” In reality, the Nunn-Lugar program contributed approximately \$1.8 billion toward the destruction of Russian chemical weapon (CW) stockpiles. It is correct that the US government did not want to “give” money directly to the Russian Ministry of Defense, as the latter wanted, but the US funds nevertheless went toward the destruction of old Soviet CW munitions stockpiles. The second commentator, identified as “historian and publicist Andrei Parshev” offered that “in order to infect enemy territory with a virus, it is enough, relatively speaking, to throw several grams of powder into a pond. Our political leadership is particularly worrying about the desire of Western partners to reduce Russia’s ability to counter biological threats.”²²

July 20, 2013

Onishchenko also used the opportunity to quickly weigh in. Speaking to the Russian Interfax news agency in a report published in the *Moscow Times* on July 20, he called the Lugar Center “a powerful offensive potential Russia deems it to be a direct violation of the BWC ... our alarm at the presence of a powerful US Navy biological laboratory in Georgia not controlled by the Georgian authorities will be increased.” This was the first of multiple statements by Russian commentators that falsely referred to the lab as a “US Navy” facility.²³ Another report referred to it as “a former Soviet military base” and quoted Simonishvili’s earlier claim that Senator Lugar had “called it a storage lab for biological weapons in one of his Senate reports after visiting Georgia.”²⁴ It also claimed that the website for the Lugar Center “reveals nothing of the activities taking place at the lab.”

²² Andrey Polunin, “The US is preparing Russia’s bio-bomb. This is more dangerous than a massive nuclear strike,” svpressa.ru, July 20, 2013.

²³ “Russian Official Warns Georgia Over U.S.-Funded Bio Lab,” *Civil Georgia*, Tbilisi, July 20, 2013, reprinted by J.P. Zanders in BWPP DF, July 24, 2013.

²⁴ Janet C. Phelan, “Russian official accuses U.S. of Biological Weapons Violations,” *Activist Post*, July 22, 2013.

July 22 and 23, 2013

Onishchenko's remarks prompted a response from several Georgian government authorities. The Georgian health minister rejected the charges. The head of the laboratory, Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze, described Onishchenko's charges as "absurd": "It is a superior-level research laboratory working on a host of projects involving highly skilled specialists from many countries. That lab isn't developing any biological weapons, it isn't pursuing any secret activities. Let me repeat: any expert, specialist researcher may come and make sure of this personally." Interfax, a Russian news agency, wrote that Gamkrelidze "said Russian experts were invited to Georgia in the wake of the allegations. 'They inspected the laboratory and released a positive report, he said.'"²⁵ This statement is incorrect: Dr. Gamkrelidze did extend an invitation directly to Onishchenko, but no one ever responded or came. There were no Russian "inspectors" or "experts" or "inspection," and no one knows of any Russian "positive report."²⁶

In addition, on July 24, 2013, the Russian newspaper, *Kommersant*, also quoted Dr. Gamkrelidze as saying that "[Russian experts have already been there] and the special representative of the prime minister, Zurab Abashidze, brought all the information to the deputy foreign minister of the Russian Federation, Grigory Karasin, during their meeting in Prague." *Kommersant* also quoted a Georgian "expert as saying that Moscow is annoyed by the existence of a US military facility in Georgia, as other facilities may appear afterwards."²⁷ The Lugar Center was not "a US military facility," and no other "US military facilities" were likely to appear in Georgia and none ever did.

July 30, 2013

The Russian Interfax news agency reported the remarks of US Ambassador to Georgia Richard Norland: "The laboratory is an open scientific enterprise and it is absolutely open for scientists of the region. The laboratory is at Georgia's disposal and it is open and transparent for scientists, including Russian ones. ... It is in Russian scientists' interests to come and inspect the facilities because it is equipped with contemporary technologies." Completion of the building of the Lugar

²⁵ "American lab to be integrated with Georgian health ministry," Interfax, July 23, 2013.

²⁶ Ketii Zaridze, personal communications, January 17 and February 4, 2020.

²⁷ "US laboratory will close deliveries to Russia," *Kommersant*, July 29, 2013. (The "deliveries" referred to Georgian agricultural products, particularly wine.)

Center in Georgia took place in 2011, and it was turned over to the Georgian National Center for Disease Control. The facility is a World Health Organization partner and open to scientists from around the world. However, Interfax devoted the rest of its report to Onishchenko who claimed that “the explanations given by Georgian officials about the operations of the US laboratory have only deepened Russian anxiety. ...There is a direct threat of course... .” He scoffed at the claims that jurisdiction over the facility was transferred to Georgian government agencies, insisting that it was “not under the control of the Georgian authorities, which does not want to open dialogue on the research being conducted there” and decried “the existence of special devices and the work of military bacteriologists from the United States. ...Russia sees this as direct violation of the BWC. And this has a powerful offensive potential.”²⁸ All of Onishchenko’s remarks are unquestionably lies, and were made after Dr. Gamkrelidze directed a specific invitation to Onishchenko asking him to send members of the Russian organization that he headed to visit the Lugar Center.

July 30, 2013

It has never been known whether Onishchenko’s lies were made on his own initiative or at the direction of the Russian Foreign Ministry or, more likely, the Kremlin. One well-informed US government official stated that since Onishchenko’s agency reported to the office of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, he was assumed to be speaking for “the [Russian] government,” which unfortunately clarifies little or nothing as to the ultimate source for his repeated grossly false statements.²⁹ An analysis published by the American Jamestown Foundation suggested that “Moscow” objected in particular to the US Department of Defense (DOD)’s role because the CTR program, had built the Lugar Center. In addition, it had been a joint Georgian-American facility between April 2011 and the transfer to the Georgian government in 2013. A Georgian administration more friendly to Moscow had been elected in 2012, but the Jamestown analysis suggested that Moscow was signaling that the Lugar Center might hinder a “reset” in Georgian–Russian relations and that it was restricting Georgian food imports to Russia to make that point.

²⁸ “Laboratory in Georgia concerning Russia is open scientific enterprise – U.S. Ambassador in Tbilisi,” Interfax, July 30, 2013.

²⁹ Personal communication, October 2, 2013.

The Jamestown report also quoted *Kommersant*, with a slightly different rendition of Gamkrelidze's alleged remarks, parts of which are correct and parts of which are a concoction.

Yet, Georgia and the US openly attempted to reassure Moscow prior to the Russian government's statements. In particular, the management of the laboratory invited officials from the office of the Russian Principal Sanitary Inspector and other Russian experts to tour the facility. 'We showed them all of the laboratory so that they could see that no "biological weapons" are produced [here], and that it does not pose a threat to Russia' the head of the Lugar center for disease control, Amiran Gamkrelidze, said. None of these explanations or inspections apparently satisfied the Russian side, however."³⁰

As already noted, in 2020 Georgian authorities denied that Dr. Gamkrelidze ever made such remarks. The Jamestown author also allowed himself a final burst of optimism: "Evidently, by rebranding the Lugar biological laboratory as a component of the Georgian Ministry of Healthcare, this implies inviting Russian specialists who will be able to follow the laboratory's work on a permanent basis."³¹

July 31, 2013

RIA Novosti again quoted Onishchenko as saying "that 'a powerful laboratory of the US naval forces' was operating in Georgia, from which ...the virus of African swine fever was brought to Russia." It added that "Earlier, the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed concerns about 'the possible development of US biological weapons near the border of the Russian Federation.'"³²

August 2013

The Russian government-controlled TV station Telekompaniye TV-Tsentr aired a forty-minute "documentary" titled "Bacteriological War Against Russia!" The film opens with a string of claims that "thousands of pigs die of a previously unknown infection in Ukraine: African Swine Fever... . About the same time, an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Pyatigorsk... The foot-

³⁰ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2240124>

³¹ Giorgi Menabde, "Georgian Authorities Take Over Joint US-Georgian Biological Research Facility under Russian Pressure," *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, 10, #140, July 30, 2013.

³² "Onishchenko suspected laboratory in Georgia of the spread of swine plague in Russia," July 31, 2013, <http://ru.rfi.fr/rossiya/20130731-onishchenko-zapodozril-aboratoriyu-v-gruzii-v-rasprostranении-svinoi-chumy-rossii>.

and-mouth disease was introduced to Russia for the first time in 2007... the Georgian facility began working with a strain of the African Swine Plague in 2006.” General Yevstignaev is filmed stating that the Lugar Center was “run by a former US intelligence chief – witnesses saw dead animals thrown into the local river.” Onishchenko adds that “the foot and mouth disease virus can be modified and made stronger.” Jeffrey Silverman, an American resident in Tbilisi about whom we will hear much more, claims that Senator Lugar “described [Bechtel Corporation] as a manufacturer of biological weapons.” The next charge presented is that “strange containers,” one of which was labeled “chemical and bacteriological weapons for a military training exercise were found in or near the town of Feodosia... . Ukrainian customs arrested the containers, but on the following day the containers were opened and their contents taken to an unknown destination.” Onishchenko returns to state that the danger from the “American” labs “exceeds the danger from intercontinental ballistic missiles. ... I state with all confidence that a military lab has been built on the territory of Georgia and is developing active offensive programs.” Another commentator named Komisarenko claims that a “weaponized virus was created” (by the US) from the corpse of a woman unearthed in Alaska who had died of “Spanish influenza” in 1918, and Yevstignaev returns to “the introduction of African Swine Plague to Cuba as a deliberate experiment in the possibility of infecting an entire country.” He then adds a fantasy description of his visit to an American BW test site, which took place in 1991 under the US-UK-Russia Trilateral site visits held during Mikhail Gorbachev’s tenure: “When our experts came there [they] walked knee-deep in debris from BW materials that were marked ‘biological weapons’.”³³

A minute-by-minute translation of the transcript provides an additional equal number of such far-fetched claims. It is useful to supply some information about Russian TV which broadcasted this gross propaganda. Seventy-four percent of the Russian population “routinely” watches the ten most prominent Russian government-controlled TV stations. The three most prominent channels cover over 90 percent of the country’s territory. TV Tsentr, which aired this propaganda film, has the fourth largest area coverage, but is only tenth in viewer ratings, with 3.5 percent of the

³³ “Bacteriological War Against Russia,” Presented by Telekompaniye TV-Tsentr, August 2013. An English-language translation of the transcript was very kindly made by Dr. Slava Paperno of Cornell University.

national audience, or 5.1 million viewers. However, public opinion surveys in Russia indicate that only 50 percent of the viewers of government-controlled TV stations believe what is shown.

August 21, 2013

Sovetskaya Rossiya Online carried a long interview with General Yevstignaev in which he reviewed various problems that went wrong in the US biodefense program between 2000 and 2013, such as the Amerithrax events in October-November 2001 and the accidental distribution of live anthracis cultures to South Korea and Germany. He then turns to all the former Soviet BW facilities that the US Nunn-Lugar program has converted in CIS states —without acknowledging that is what they were— and names another nine countries around the world in which he says that the United States will do the same. Although only a few weeks earlier, Yevstignaev had claimed that the Lugar Center was “run by a former US intelligence chief,” he now states that the facility in Georgia is headed by a former leader of the Georgian intelligence service. He returns to Onishchenko and the alleged Georgian responsibility for the spread of African Swine Fever and posits two possibilities: “Specialists are offering two highly likely versions of this situation: a technological accident that involved leakage of a genetically modified strain and intentional actions by Georgia (for example, dumping the carcasses of pigs that died of the disease into the Inguri River) for the purpose of causing environmental damage to South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Russia.”³⁴

August 29, 2013

A posting on the US site *Salon* is titled “The US is building a bioweapons lab in Kazakhstan.” The four-page, single-spaced article concerns the new Kazakh Scientific Center of Quarantine and Zoonotic Diseases, which will replace the Soviet-era Central Asian Anti-Plague Scientific Research Institute, founded in 1949. The article contains numerous factual errors, but, despite the inflammatory title of the article, these all concern various aspects of BW in general. It is not until the very last lines on the third page that the journalist asked “Is it possible, as some Russian critics have alleged, that labs like this could serve as brain trusts and storehouses for weapons

³⁴ Valeriy Kirillov, “Biological Weapons – A Real Threat: Interview of Valentin Ivanovich Yevstigneyev,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya Online*, August 21, 2013.

research, for either the US or their home countries?” and quotes Onishchenko to provide a positive answer.³⁵

September 10, 2013 to October 17, 2013: Onishchenko offensive against the Lugar Center

Between September 10 and October 17, Onishchenko makes statements on five separate occasions:

“We have a total, unambiguous and highly negative opinion regarding the true purpose of this military facility, which is adjacent to the border with Russia and we are taking a very hard line,” Gennadiy Onishchenko told the agency. “We’ve heard another load of nonsense about this laboratory from the US ambassador to Georgia. He is evading the question: what are American military microbiologists doing in Georgia We know what they’re up to and what they’re discussing at expert level.”³⁶

In another Interfax report, Onishchenko said, “We still associate the regime of admission of Georgian products to the Russian market with the operations of US military entities on Georgian territory. They are beyond Georgian control and engaged in activities outlawed by biological conventions.”³⁷

The following week, he said that, “According to our assessments, this laboratory constitutes an important offensive link in the US military-biological capability.” The report continues with his claim “that components developed at the facility could be secretly employed to destabilize the political and economic situation in Russia.”³⁸

September 27 to October 6, 2013

In what appears to be an agglomeration of several items, Jeffrey Silverman, described as an “American investigative journalist,” makes another appearance. He will play a much more

³⁵ Alex Pasternack, “The US is building a bioweapons lab in Kazakhstan,” Salon, August 29, 2013.

³⁶ “Russian official raises objections to US ‘military biolaboratory’ in Georgia,” Interfax, September 10, 2013 (in English).

³⁷ “Russia cannot help but be concerned about US military lab in Georgia – Onishchenko,” Interfax, October 2, 2013 (in English).

³⁸ “US Lab in Georgia at Center of Storm over Biological Warfare Claims,” secure-web.cisco.com, October 15, 2013.

important role later on in 2018, the second year since 2013 that featured a major onslaught in Russian BW-related disinformation. An earlier, August 17, 2010 profile of Silverman in Geonews/Word Press states that “he has lived in Georgia for the last 18 years,” which would mean since 1992.³⁹ The profile portrays Silverman as having lived and worked as an international entrepreneur in a range of places, including Brazil and Australia and many places in between, but it is impossible to verify the many extravagant claims in the profile. In 2013, Silverman was reporting for *Veterans Today*, a Russian intelligence agency proxy publication targeting US military veterans and publishing completely fabricated conspiracy theories of the wildest sort.⁴⁰

Silverman’s first identified BW disinformation publication appears in *Hvino/Wine News* and, after quoting Onishchenko, reports that the Lugar Center “is officially designed to implement bio weapons programmes that date back to the period of the Soviet Union.” Bechtel is again introduced as leading to “the huge menace of the proliferation of bio-weapons by the US.”⁴¹ Silverman then reports that “American donated vaccines ... actually had non-humanitarian intentions, *i.e.*, they were being used in sinister field trials of cocktails of different vaccines.” A third entry quotes Silverman saying that “... a number of labs, strewn across Eastern Europe, these are umbilically tied to the Biological Weapon Proliferation Prevention (BWPP) programme – and this is a cover for what is most likely an offensive programme.”⁴²

Silverman is also quoted in another publication as saying that the Lugar Center was

developing hazardous substances which were being tested on local residents. Silverman claims that experiments with viruses and bacteria could have caused the spread of such dangerous illnesses as pig flu and measles. The journalist further claims that an effort is being made to expand the programme and produce weaponized agents which can be used in biowarfare. He has said on national TV that “if there is an emergency, Georgia will be

³⁹ “Jeffrey K. Silverman: A Man Chasing After the Truth,” Geonews/Word Press, August 7, 2010.

⁴⁰ Wikipedia entry for *Veterans Today*.

⁴¹ Jeffrey K. Silverman for *Veterans Today*, “Georgia to open Lugar biolab for Russian experts,” *Hvino/Wine News*, September 27 2013, with additional material included.

⁴² The above apparently republished by *Veterans Today* under the same title on October 6, 2013, with additional material included.

wiped off the face of the earth. In the Tbilisi laboratory they have the capacity to work with anthrax, measles, black plague and H1N1.

The article ends with the following:

China Affected by US Biological Effort in April 2013. A Chinese Air Force officer accused the US government of created the new strain of bird flu, which is now afflicting parts of China, as a deliberate biological attack. People’s Liberation Army Sr. Col. Dai Zu said that the US had released the H7N9 bird flu virus into China as an act of biological warfare. This charge was first reported in the state-run Guangzhou province newspaper Southern Metropolis Daily and then picked up by several news outlets in Asia. Dai is a military strategist who has in the past outspokenly sought to foment conflict between China and the United States. Writing on SinaWeibo, a Chinese micro blogging site akin to Twitter, Dai stated that the new bird flu strain had been designed as a biological weapon similar to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which had affected China in 2003, which he also claimed had been developed as a US bio-weapon. “America was fighting in Iraq and feared that China would take advantage of the opportunity to take other actions,” he said. “This is why they used bio-psychological weapons against China. All of China fell into turmoil, and this was exactly what the United States wanted.”⁴³

October 17, 2013

A Russian publication, *Svobodnaya Pressa*, gathered together several “experts” to support Onischenko’s allegations, and to add a few new ones of their own. It first quotes Onishchenko saying that “the US Army Medication [sic] Department biological laboratory in Georgia had synthetically produced the swine fever infection that struck our agricultural sector.” He goes on to say that “Everyone in the world knows that the Americans will stop at nothing to achieve their goals” and that “the Georgian themselves do not have access to...the US laboratory in Georgia.” The report then states that “Valeriy Glazko ... [a] member of the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences, believes that US experts might have developed biological weapons, but are hardly likely to use them.” Nevertheless, he says that “the Americans would hardly carry out

⁴³ Andrei Akulov, “Does the US Comply with International Bio-Weapons Ban?,” Euro.who, August 2013.

such projects in real life. Our complacency is more likely to be blamed for the outbreaks of swine fever Personally I find Onishchenko's arguments surprising."

Glazko's remarks, however, were quickly countered by "Mikhail Supotnitskiy, a doctor of biology and expert in military virology, [who] points out that the United States activity in Georgia looks very much like it is gearing up for a war. The use of biological weapons is possible. For example, the virus that infected livestock in Belarus recently was in foreign feed Such laboratories were always built before a war. I think that Onishchenko is not sharing everything he knows with the public. The thing is we have a large information system. He is not just expressing empty concerns. What he is saying about swine fever is very serious."

Supotnitskiy was formerly affiliated with the Russian Ministry of Defense Institute of Microbiology in Kirov, one of the three major former Soviet BW facilities.

The final "expert" introduced is "Konstantin Sokolov, vice president of the Academy of Geopolitical Sciences," who believes that "the United States will use any methods It would hardly be surprising if they were to use biological weapons ... mankind can only be freed from this threat if there is a fundamental change in the current world order."⁴⁴

October 23, 2013

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev dismissed Onishchenko from his position as the head of *Rospotrebnadzor*, to which he had been appointed at its foundation in 2004. At the same time, Medvedev appointed him as an "aide" in the Office of the Prime Minister, where he would "deal with issues similar to his previous field of expertise."⁴⁵

August 15, 2014

A Russian disinformation site, artfully named the *Investment Watch Blog*, reports that:

Bill and Melinda Gates have connections with biological weapons labs located in Kenema, the epicenter of the epidemic of Ebola developed from the hospital where they were doing clinical trials in humans for the development of its vaccine, and now,

⁴⁴ Andrey Ivanov, "Viruses in Pentagon's Service – Gennadiy Onishchenko has Accused United States and Georgia of Using Biological Weapons against Georgia. Russian Experts Back Health Chief's Claim of Threat from US Laboratory in Georgia," *Svobodnaya Pressa*, October 17, 2013.

⁴⁵ "End quote: Russia's colorful chief sanitary inspector replaced," RT, October 24, 2013; "Russia's Onishchenko Appointed Aid to Medvedev," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 23, 2013.

following the opening of an informal survey, it appears the name of Georgia Soros, through its Foundation, is funding the laboratory of biological weapons.”⁴⁶

It further explained that “Glenn Thomas, a leading consultant in Geneva, an expert in AIDS and, above all, Ebola virus, [who] was on board the Boeing 777 Malaysian Airlines cut down on the border between Ukraine and Russia” had discovered the above conspiracy and was going to disclose it. Thus, “Glenn Thomas was murdered.”⁴⁷ Gates and Soros will both appear again as major targets in Russian coronavirus disinformation in 2020.

Just a few days earlier, Onishchenko had suggested that these were reasons to be suspicious about the Ebola outbreak. “I am concerned about the prevalence and pathogenicity of the situation, which is too much even for Ebola. Too many people are dying. I don’t rule out that there is something artificial here What is happening with Ebola there, could there also be something man-made about it.”⁴⁸

Another Russian disinformation site that masqueraded under the old *Pravda* name returned to the 1980s Soviet AIDS disinformation story and links it to the Ebola outbreak as well.

Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, wrote this a few days ago. “Another method is disease infection through bio-weapons such as Ebola and AIDS, which are race targeting weapons. There is a weapon that can be put in a room where there are Black and White people, and it will kill only the Black and spare the White, because it is a genotype weapon that is designed for your genes, for your race, for your kind.” In essence, Mr. Farrakhan said that the US Federal Government is behind the Ebola virus outbreak. Mr. Farrakhan is incorrect, as his usual, in many respects dealing with the issue of Ebola virus, but he is correct about Ebola being a “manufactured disease by the US Federal Government. Here is the true story about the Ebola virus”

Strangely enough, that is if you believe the world is flat, in 1976, and after the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) build a bio weapons laboratory in Kenema, Sierra Leone, Africa, the Ebola virus suddenly came into being.

⁴⁶ “PROOF! Ebola Expert Killed on MH17, Kenema Bioweapons Lab Created ‘New Ebola Strain,’” *Investment Watch Blog*, August 15, 2014.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Ebola can be turned into bioweapons, Russian and UK experts warn,” RT, August 8, 2014.

The “newly discovered” internal hemorrhaging virus was the “bomb.” It was developed with the covert aid of Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. The USAMRIID is always looking for some type of weaponry with which to inflict death and destruction on an enemy, and this new Ebola virus seemed the perfect weapon of war. Then as often happens with that type of research and development, the virus ‘escaped’ and suddenly was a threat to an unsuspecting African population, and ultimately to the population of the world. ... The world is now told that this Ebola virus is a “natural mutation” when in fact it is a completely manufactured mutation of the Lassa fever virus. The world is also told that there is no current cure for this virus when in fact there is a quite inexpensive treatment available. ... So now, unfortunately, the world’s population must suffer from a disease that was created to kill and sicken in time of war by the USAMRIID (Fort Detrick, Maryland) and Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, when there is no declared war, or need for this wanton death and destruction.⁴⁹

The “inexpensive treatment available” was Vitamin C, which “has been proved [sic] to kill every virus known to man.”

In the fall of 2014, a *New York Times* reporter commented:

The spread of Ebola from western Africa to suburban Texas has brought with it another strain of contagion: conspiracy theories.

The outbreak began in September, when *The Daily Observer*, a Liberian newspaper, published an article alleging that the virus was not what it seemed – a medical disaster – but rather a bioweapon designed by the United States military to depopulate the planet. Not long after, accusations appeared online contending that the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had patented the virus and was poised to make a fortune from a new vaccine it had created with the pharmaceutical industry. There were even reports that the New World Order, that classic conspiracy bugbear involving global elites,

⁴⁹ “Ebola: Manufactured disease by US Federal Government,” *Pravda Report*, October 8, 2014, https://www.pravdareport.com/society/128746-ebola_virus#sthash.7mrBSqs4.dpuf. Authorship is confused, as the title page names Dmitry Sudakov, while the end of the story carries the pseudonym “Lord Howard Hurts, freedomfiles.blogspot.”

had engineered Ebola in order to impose quarantines, travel bans and eventually martial law....

And just days ago, the hip-hop artist Chris Brown took to Twitter, announcing to his 13 million followers: “I don’t know but I think this Ebola epidemic is a form of population control.” ... More recently, the AIDS epidemic was also said to have been caused by a government plot.⁵⁰

The *New York Times* reporter appears to have been ignorant of the fact that the earlier conspiracy “theories” about AIDS were deliberate Soviet disinformation, and that the suggestions that Ebola had been deliberately produced and spread by the United States and USAMRIID for purposes of “depopulating” black African countries was a direct transposition of the earlier lies. As will be seen, Russian government disinformation following the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic in January 2020 repeated several of these exact same themes.

October 31, 2015

In June 2015, the Russian Foreign Ministry had apparently released a statement attacking the Lugar Center in Georgia, saying, among other things, that: “American and Georgian authorities are trying to cover up the real nature of this US military unit, which studies highly dangerous infectious diseases. The Pentagon is trying to establish similar covert medico-biological facilities in other countries [in Russia’s neighborhood].” Now, following a meeting of Russia’s National Security Council, its head, Nicolai Patrushev, complained that “Washington pours ‘tens of billions of dollars’ into bio-weapons laboratories that operate on the territories of the Commonwealth of [newly] Independent States (CIS) that were part of the former Soviet bloc [sic] and that now surround Russia.” He added,

There are other problems, such as the production of military-oriented biological weapons and the very large funding allocated to this.... This is tens of billions of dollars.

Additionally, the number of laboratories under US jurisdiction or control has increased 20 times.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Alan Feuer, “The Ebola Conspiracy Theories,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 2014.

⁵¹ “Russian warns of growing US-funded bio-weapons labs in region,” PRESSTV/RT, October 31, 2015.

February 2016

The weekly summary, *EU vs Disinformation*, for the first week of February 2016 listed three relevant items:

- “Edward Snowden says that America infects Russians with biological weapons. More than 80 percent of Russian food is contaminated.” The item is dated February 3, 2016, but no source for the alleged statement was given.
- The claim that “The Rockefeller Foundation owns the patent for the Zika virus,” appeared in *Zem a Vek* on February 4, 2016.
- “Zika virus is owned by American and British companies and available for purchase on the internet,” appeared in *Svobodnenoviny.eu*, February 3, 2016, and repeated by *GlobalResearch*, located in Canada, a Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) intelligence proxy.

February 15, 2016

Gennady Onishchenko, in remarks to the *BBC Russian Service*, suggested that the Lugar Center in Georgia had released mosquitos infected with the Zika virus in Abkhazia, the region of Georgia that seceded and then came under Russian military protection.

Russian scientists have identified a surge since 2012 in the kind of mosquito that carries the virus in Abkhazia, a breakaway region that borders Russian on the Black Sea coast. “This worries me because about 100 kilometers from the place where this mosquito now lives, there is a military laboratory of the army of the United States. The Pentagon did not build a military microbiological base to protect Georgian children from measles.”⁵²

At the time of these remarks in 2016, Onishchenko was serving as a special assistant to Prime Minister Medvedev. The fabricated Zika allegations and the targeting of the Gates Foundation

⁵² Tom Balmforth, “Former Russian Health Chief Suggests U.S. Plotting Zika Attack,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 16, 2016.

were picked up by *Information Nigeria*, which advertises itself as “Nigeria’s Largest Information Portal”:

The Zika virus is a bioweapon that is using GMO (genetically modified) mosquitos to spread “future diseases” according to a Kremlin report. And the finger of blame is being pointed squarely at Bill Gates according to [Disclose.tv](#). It is understood the bioweapon was developed by Bill Gates to achieve his self confessed Illuminati goal of depopulating the world. According to a leaked highly confidential Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) report that has been read by sources in the Kremlin it has been revealed that the Zika virus was “cooked up as a bioweapon” by “world governments and non-government organization.” It is understood the chief non-government organization behind the Zika virus is Bill Gates’ own Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

President Putin is said to be “angered.” There have been meetings in the past 24 hours regarding banning Gates from the Russian Federation. As well as plans to protect humanity from the “world government created bioweapon.” “GMOs are humanity’s mortal enemy and these agents won’t be happy until most of us are dead.” “Western powers are in their final death throes, thrashing about and clutching at straws, using the last weapons in their arsenal of dirty tricks against humanity. We must not allow these GMO serial killers to poison our children.”

In 2010, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded Australian research scientists to release GMO mosquitos infected with a bacterium. That same year, Bill Gates confessed he wanted to depopulate the world – a key Illuminati goal. The world today has 6.8 billion people; that’s headed up to about 9 billion,” he said during the invitation-only TED Conference. “Now if we do a really great job on new vaccines, health care, reproductive health services, we lower that by perhaps 10 or 15 percent.”⁵³

April-May 2016

⁵³ Jo Daniel, “Russia Accuses Bill Gates of Engineering the Zika Virus As a ‘Bioweapon,’” *Information Nigeria*, February 2016.

Author Alexander Netyosov writes in the Russian journal, *Military Bulletin*, that the United States has made

ceaseless efforts to create bioweapons on an industrial scale ... during the last half century. ... the US military openly started to escalate its biological warfare capability under the guise of a network of secret labs and facilities, including those abroad...after the infamous events of 9/11 and the adoption of the Patriot Act ... this network of biolab centers—or rather biological warfare facilities—is not limited geographically to the United States: it’s steadily approaching the borders of the Russian Federation itself.⁵⁴

Netyosov’s charges finally arrived at Ukraine and Georgia, saying that the purpose of the Lugar Center in Georgia was for the United States “to implement its biological warfare programs.” The author then quotes from a February 15, 2016, interview that Onishchenko gave to the *BBC* in which he reported that, in 2012, Russian entomologists found a subspecies of mosquito that can carry the Zika virus, and he linked this directly to the “military microbiological laboratory of the army of the United States” in Georgia; *viz*, the Lugar Center. “This is hardly the only example of how the United States is encircling our country with a huge network of biological warfare facilities By the way, last winter’s flu epidemic in Russia was to a large degree Ukrainian in origin (or perhaps American?).”⁵⁵ By claiming that Zika had never been a problem until recently, and that the US Pentagon has been working with the agent, the article implies that the appearance of the Zika virus in Latin America was due to either an accidental or an intentional release by US agencies. It also stated that the Pentagon freely conducts extensive experiments with innovative “medical preparations” that specifically target ethnic and racial characteristics of target populations. Finally, it cites the chief editor of the Russian journal *National Defense*, Igor Korotchenko saying that a Russian Defense agency was effectively countering “lethal American viruses” that were currently being experimented with in “military institutes” and were intended to be spread on the territory of Russia by terrorists or NATO special forces.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Alexander Netyosov, “American BioPro and the Ukrainian-Georgian Virus,” *Military Bulletin: South Russia*, no. 16 (24276), April 25-May 1, 2016.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

May 13, 2016

The Zika story travelled on, appearing in *Pravda Report* as a long and wild anti-American rant titled “American Bioweaponry,” ostensibly by an American author, William Edstrom, who ran for a US congressional seat as a Green Party candidate in 2014. It opens with the lines “The Zika mutant was the kick off. 99 US government viral constructs on their way to break out. The US government has a vast arsenal of biological weapons of mass destruction and plans to let loose.” The author refers to “Ebola pox,” a hangover from Ken Alibek’s book, and claims that US Department of Energy laboratories are the locations that are making and stockpiling US biological weapons.⁵⁷

November 7–11, 2016

Between November 7 and 11, 2016, the World Health Organization held a “Training Course on the Establishment of a National Biosecurity System” at the Lugar Center. The participants were “national professionals at the decision maker level from the public health, law enforcement and security sector in governments working in the area of legislative aspects of national biosecurity.”⁵⁸ There were nineteen participants from: Azerbaijan (3), Kazakhstan (3), Georgia (6), Moldova (3), and Ukraine (4). There were four objectives to the course, two of which were “identify ways to dovetail biosecurity with biosafety into comprehensive biorisk management” and “improve country biopreparedness and response for accidental or intentional release of biological agents.” The instructors for the course were the director and three staff members from the Center for Biosecurity and Preparedness in Denmark. They lectured in English and were assisted by an interpreter from the WHO who translated into Russian. The Danish team of four was also permitted to visit the BL-4 lab at the Lugar Center. The Danish Director had previously visited the BL-4 labs in the United Kingdom and the United States and he found the one in Georgia to be very similar and not unusual in any way.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ William Edstrom, “American Bioweaponry,” *Pravda Report*, May 13, 2016, http://www.pravdareport.com/opinion/134413-american_bioweaponry/. Note that this site is not related to the Russian newspaper, *Pravda*, but makes use of the same name.

⁵⁸ World Health Organization, “Training Course on the Establishment of a National Biosecurity System – Concept sheet,” n.d.

⁵⁹ Dr. John-Erik Hansen, personal communications, May 1-2, 2020.

November 29, 2016

Dr. Michael Kovalchuk, a Russian physicist and the current director of the prestigious Kurchatov Institute in Moscow and a Putin favorite, made a presentation to members of the Russian Duma “warning that the global elite, overseen by the United States, is developing a special human subspecies—a genetically different caste of labouring ‘servant people’ who eat little, think small, and reproduce only on command.”⁶⁰

December 23, 2016

In December 2016, a particularly disreputable British tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Star*, quoted a American academic given to conspiracy theories, Francis Boyle, in regard to the re-emergence of Ebola in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Boyle said that “What we are dealing with here is a biological warfare work that was conducted at the bio-warfare laboratories set up by the USA on the West coast of Africa I think those laboratories, one or more of them, are the origins of the Ebola epidemic.” Boyle went on to claim that he “had proof that that Pentagon had ordered the CDC [Centers for Disease Control] to test biological weapons work in Sierra Leone as early as 1988.”⁶¹

2017

On February 3, 2017, the main evening news program, “Vremya pokazhet” [Time Will Tell], on Russia’s government-owned Channel One (*Pervyi Kanal*) carried a report claiming that “Ukraine used the United States to spread the Ebola virus among pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk,” in Ukraine.⁶² In January 2020, this same prime Russian TV channel would again serve as the platform for particularly bizarre examples of BW disinformation related to the outbreak of coronavirus.

October 31, 2017

⁶⁰ Maria Antonova, “Putin’s Great Patriotic Pseudoscience,” *Foreign Policy*, November 29, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/29/putins-great-patriotic-pseudoscience/>.

⁶¹ Rachel O’Donoghue, “Killer disease created by US and released in BIO-WARFARE attack. The US government manufactured one of the world’s deadliest diseases and deliberately released it to kill BILLIONS, according to an explosive theory,” *The Daily Star*, December 23, 2016.

⁶² “Vremya Pokazhet, Pervyi Kanal, February 3, 2017, *Disinfo Review*, Issue #57, February 2017.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the South Ossetian government, the breakaway province that seceded from Georgia with Russian military assistance in 2008, stated that “The South Ossetian side again expressed concern about non-typical pandemic diseases of humans and animals in Georgia, as well as the so called ‘Lugar Laboratory’ located on the territory of Georgia, and the increased rate of outbreaks of dangerous pandemics in South Ossetia.” In doing this, the South Ossetians were parroting similar statements by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, and Onishchenko. Speaking at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in September 2016, Lavrov had reportedly stated that the United States was conducting biological warfare against Russia using laboratories in neighboring countries, and falsely added that the Lugar Center was closed to Russian scientists.

The Director of Georgia’s National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), Amiran Gamkrelidze, used the opportunity to publicly supply some important information (which was further critically amplified in 2019). He reported that the Lugar Center has had

joint research projects with German, Norwegian and other European scientists. Scientists from post-Soviet countries such as Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have visited the Lugar Center several times and participated in research projects. ... Russian officials are well aware that no biological weapons are being developed at the Lugar Center. It is an open research facilityThe NCDC has several times invited officials of the Russian Ministry of Health to visit the Lugar Center on site. Unfortunately, so far, they did not express willingness to arrive. However other Russian scientists have visited the facility.⁶³

Gamkrelidze also disclosed that the Lugar Center had hosted Russian media at their request three times, during which they conducted interviews and filmed inside in the Center’s laboratories, “although only one Russian channel ‘Rossiya 24’, broadcast it.” Gamkrelidze also stated that the Center was “open to qualified scientists from around the world,” and that Russian officials also

⁶³ “Is a Secret US Lab in Georgia Spreading Deadly Pathogens against Russian Interests?,” Polygraph.info, October 31, 2017.

know that “--- no leakages, contamination or losses of dangerous pathogens has ever been detected, and none of the scientists working with EDPs has ever been infected.”⁶⁴

November 3, 2017

In the summer of 2017, Russian *RT TV* publicized a US Air Force (USAF) procurement order for a commercial company to gather DNA samples from people in the Caucasus. On October 30th, 2017, President Putin commented that “biomaterial” from Russian citizens was being gathered “systematically and professionally” by foreigners, and asked “why are they doing this?” On November 1st, a USAF spokesperson told *Tass* and *Meduza* that the samples were being collected for research “on the human musculoskeletal system” in order to locate “biomarkers associated with injuries.” It was not immediately apparent why the USAF could not have sought the same kind of samples for the same reasons in Colorado or Montana or Saskatchewan, but the very next day, Onishchenko “called for legislation to tighten control over laboratories with foreign capital that gather biomaterial, calling it a threat to national security.” A second member of the Russia Duma, Colonel Frants Klintsevich, added that “I’m not asserting that we are talking about specific preparations for a biological war against Russia. But that scenario is undoubtedly being prepared.” But Onishchenko was more explicit. “This is an aggressive biological program that was banned by the 1972 Convention on biological and toxic weapons.”⁶⁵

November 3, 2017

A journalist for the independent Moscow newspaper, *The Moscow Times*, immediately published an excellent debunking story. He began with Putin’s remark in a public forum that “foreigners are collecting biomaterial across Russia ‘purposefully and professionally.’ ... ‘Why are they going to different ethnic groups and to people living in different geographical locations across Russia?’ Putin asked. ‘Why are they doing this?’” and then continued,

That night, Franz Klintsevich, the deputy chairman of the Federation Council’s Committee for Defense and Security, offered a theory. “I’m not saying that this is about preparing a biological war against Russia,” he wrote on his Facebook page. “But those

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Tom Balmforth “Gene Warfare? Russia’s Accusations of U.S. DNA Gathering Get Raised Eyebrows, Lawsuit Threat,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 3, 2017.

scenarios, without a doubt, are being developed. That is to say, in case the need suddenly arises.”

It wasn't long until some of Russia's most infamous officials were adding to the charged rhetoric. The collection of Russian fluids, organs and tissues, said Gennady Onishchenko of the Duma's committee on education and science, is “nothing other than proof that the United States has not ceased its offensive military program.”

To cap it off, Onishchenko claimed that there was a “belt of biological warfare facilities” surrounding Russia in neighboring Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.” ...

Mikhail Davydov, the head of the Russian Academy Medical Sciences, told the *Moscow Times* that there was nothing new about how Russian samples were being collected. “This has been going on for twenty years,” he said, adding that the practice was reciprocal. “We send material to various countries, and they send material to us.”⁶⁶

Several Russian academicians then explained that it was impossible to make “ethnic” “bioweapons,” and that “the goal of studying genetic material is primarily to cure disease and not to develop weapons.”⁶⁷ The question of collection of DNA samples in Russia that would be sent to non-Russian entities had come up exactly ten years earlier, in 2007, after Nikolai Patrushev, “then head of the FSB, expressed concern to Putin over the development of biological weapons.” The Russian government response in 2007 to Patrushev's appeal to Putin was to require two different government agencies, one of them *Rospotrebnadzor*—headed by Onishchenko—to approve the export of human DNA samples from Russia before the Russian Federal Customs Service authorized the export.⁶⁸ One of the Russian academicians said in an interview with NSN radio: “Someone majorly deceived Vladimir Putin.”⁶⁹ But is it really likely that Putin, who had served as the head of the FSB during 1998–99, the years before became president, had been “deceived,” or is the phrase simply something more judicious for a senior Russian scientist to say

⁶⁶ Even Gershkovich, “Is the US Really Targeting Russians With Bio Weapons?,” *The Moscow Times*, November 3, 2017, <www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/11/03/is-the-us-suddenly-targeting-russians-with-bio-weapons-a59464>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Personal communication, January 16, 2020.

⁶⁹ Gershkovich, “Is the US Really Targeting Russians With Bio Weapons?”

than that Putin was knowingly lying? This exemplifies the question for which we are never able to determine the answer. It can safely be assumed that Klintsevich and Onishchenko know that their remarks are fabrications and lies, is it plausible that Putin was truly “deceived” by subordinates, or more likely that he knowingly participated in a deliberate misinformation campaign. As a life-long KGB officer and with certain knowledge that a close subordinate on his Kremlin staff was coordinating a large-scale disinformation campaign—at this point in its seventh year—the latter is far more probable.

2018

2018 saw an explosion in the number of Russian BW disinformation releases, particularly directed at the Lugar Center in Georgia. Although I tend to interpret the Russia disinformation efforts *sui generis*—directed at their stated targets, primarily the United States, to suggest that the US is violating the BWC, and secondarily to Georgia—various commentators have attributed these campaigns to Russian attempts to divert attention from particular international activities of their own. Three Russian activities have been mentioned, and it is therefore useful to indicate what they are and to provide their dates:

- (1) The attempt by Russian GRU agents to poison a former Soviet GRU officer living in Salisbury, England, on March 4, 2018. The UK government investigation demonstrated that the chemical agent employed was in the Novichok family of the most advanced organophosphate CW agents.⁷⁰ Following investigation by scientists at the UK Ministry of Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) at Porton Down, Prime Minister Theresa May “called for Russia to provide full disclosure of its Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) whose inspectors she had invited an independent, international investigation into the incident.”⁷¹ The OPCW corroborated the identification of the agent, but no more, and unsurprisingly, the Russian government declined the request to disclose its Novichok research and development

⁷⁰ The UK Government has only ever used a generic term, for example, the Prime Minister on March 12, 2018. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-03-12/debates/722E1DF5-68E2-41A0-8F3C-23B6480B93BF/SalisburyIncident>.

⁷¹ Stephen Lewis, “Salisbury, Novichok, and International Law on the Use of Force,” *RUSI Journal*, 163:4, August/September 2018, pp. 10-19.

program. However, it was the Russian ambassador in London, Ambassador Alexander Yakovenko, who identified it specifically as A-234 in the Novichok family of nerve agents.⁷² The British investigation, which strongly implicated the Russian government as being responsible, took some months to be completed, as did the discussion at the OPCW regarding the events.

- (2) The investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller in the United States concerning the electronic interference by Russian intelligence agencies in the US 2016 presidential election. The investigation stretched from May 2017 to March 2019.⁷³
- (3) The Russian government denial of Syrian government use of the chemical nerve agent, Sarin, in Khan Shaykhun on April 4, 2019. Russia also supported Syria at the United Nations and at the OPCW, despite evidence that Syria had not complied with its obligations after it signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention. Over the course of two to three years, the Russian government denied the results of the reports by the OPCW and the UN Secretary-General's Joint Investigatory Mechanism (JIM), which attributed the use of chemical weapons during the Syrian Civil War overwhelmingly to the Syrian government. Russia obstructed the acceptance of these reports and the relevant proceedings at the OPCW as much as it could.

These events will be discussed in additional detail later in this paper.

January 16, 2018

South Front, one of the disinformation sites most directly connected to the Russian SVR intelligence agency, posted what was unquestionably the masterpiece of all the Russian or Russian-sponsored BW disinformation releases in a period of ten years. Titled “The Pentagon Bio-Weapons,” the 49-page-long post was ostensibly authored by Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, “a Bulgarian investigative journalist and Middle East correspondent.”⁷⁴ The posting includes

⁷² Mark Peplow, “Nerve agent attack on spy used ‘Novichok’ poison,” *Chemical & Engineering News* 96:12 (March 19, 2018), p. 3.

⁷³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mueller_report.

⁷⁴ Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, “The Pentagon Bioweapons,” *South Front* (in English) January 16, 2018. The same item also appeared in Russian on *News Front*, a sister *web* platform “which recognizes the independence of Donbas in

dozens of photocopied portions of declassified and unclassified reports dealing with the pre-1969 US offensive BW program dating back as 1951, when offensive work was not yet prohibited by the BWC. All of the US documentation is of course authentic and accurate, but fabrications and falsehoods appear between the authentic items. For example, it asserts that a particular mosquito species being investigated at the Lugar Center in Georgia had never before been found in Russia, although it is endemic in Turkey or in the Mediterranean region. Reports of pathogens that were worked on or tested in the US BW program prior to 1969, such as those that cause tularemia or anthrax, are followed by references to the same pathogens under investigation in the Lugar Center. The suggestion is then made or implied that the United States is continuing its pre-1969 offensive BW work at the Lugar Center. A large number of other legitimate and publicly available documents, such as US-Georgian contracts concerning the Lugar Center, were also included. The compilation was unquestionably prepared by Russian intelligence services. On February 9, 2018, an online platform titled “Georgia and the World” posted another item by Gaytandzhieva titled “What are the links between the flies spreading Leishmaniasis and the deaths of two Filipino men working at the Lugar Laboratory.”⁷⁵ In a later posting also in 2018, Gaytandzhieva had a different story, writing that the two Filipino workers “died from alleged gas poisoning in flat.”

January 31, 2018

Jeffrey Silverman returned to the subject of the Lugar Center and hepatitis. He claimed that the “vaccines” that Georgia was using were illegal in Europe and America, and as an example named those being used for the treatment of hepatitis C. The pharmaceutical that had been used in Georgia to fight hepatitis, Sofosburir, is not a “vaccine;” it is legal, sold under the tradename Sovaldi, and it is used in Iceland, Germany, France, Italy, and the United States. In addition, in the Georgian public health campaign to eradicate hepatitis C, 36,012 patients were treated in thirty-two institutions with a cure rate of 98 percent. Twenty-four thousand four hundred and

Ukraine and notes that the purpose of the edition is to defend the interests of Russian civilization.” *Myth Detector*, Feb 27, 2018. In 2017 and earlier Gaytandzhieva had worked for the Bulgarian newspaper *Trud*, owned by Delyan Peevski, a Bulgarian oligarch who owns 80% of Bulgarian print media.

⁷⁵ “Disinformation about Filipino Workers and Bulgarian journalist with Russian Links,” *Myth Detector*, Feb 27, 2018.

eighty-one patients were cured between April 2015 and October 2017.⁷⁶ That a very small percentage of patients died during the course of treatment is certainly not a surprise and not a deliberate consequence of the use of the medication.

The Gaytandzhieva report was reposted on several platforms. It was posted on a second Russian disinformation platform, *Fort Russ News*, on October 5, a day after General Kirillov's Moscow press conference (see the entries for June 10 and September 25, 2018 below) on another Russian proxy conspiracy site named *21st CENTURY WIRE*,⁷⁷ which posted no less than seven Gaytandzhieva reports in 2018,⁷⁸ and finally in June 2019 in an enlarged and further embellished version in a web platform established by Gaytandzhieva in Serbia named *Arms Watch*.⁷⁹ Gaytandzhieva added that the United States had deployed more than 200 military biological laboratories around the world. This fabrication was repeated by Yahoo News in the United States quoting a "youth blog" a disinformation publication in India, named the ED Times, as well as a site called South Africa News, which turned out to be a subsidiary of an international disinformation network, the Big News Network, also based in India.⁸⁰ In the midst of the Skripal events in the United Kingdom, Gaytandzhieva also claimed that London Underground commuters were being subjected to "secret gas experiments." Gaytandzhieva made her charges in an interview on the Rossiya 1 News of the week TV program with Dimitry Kiselyov, Russia's most prominent TV news anchor.⁸¹ This, too, was reported by *21st CENTURY WIRE*. The *Fort Russ News* story claimed that "Russia has filed an official information request with the United

⁷⁶ "Misinformation about Drugs used in the Hepatitis C Elimination Program being prohibited in the West," *Myth Detector*, January 31, 2018.

⁷⁷ Joaquin Flores "Confirmed: U.S. Creating Biological Weapons in Tbilisi, Georgia – Russia Orders 'stop,'" *Fort Russ News*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.fort-russ.com/2018/10/confirmed-u-s-creating-biological-weapons-in-tbilisi-georgia-russia-orders-stop/>.

⁷⁸ <https://21stcenturywire.com/>.

⁷⁹ http://armswatch.com/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=3087321211884a47bb5880faba2edd42b09d62c7-1584751368-0-Abt8bYAid4sQklajzl8vtNwqWTwP7N0pN-5zKvwvFK6TDIe_3oaqkQiZdpe4oFzasJiEgaKzn-Je2AbmyYTPOYfjk1GFAqdGNzMdv5QII-dE-_oF-4cY5uCxZUEOckhgV-xu9TG1aBKgv1HfCYuC70EC_sn8hBhQzahCYMmjPogAljGDGCw9wWZR-4bu2fj8d2Z3IM_1tP8TXsnwcYiTakBBGK0XIhbM1IMPjrccjVtpZwD3hYALMKgXKEfwaWtzuPIKkhM7Zome93QxuqHpWg.

⁸⁰ "The Republic of South Africa May be a Secret Testing Ground for US Bioweapons," *South Africa News.Net*, October 1, 2020.

⁸¹ "Russian TV peddles fake story about secret gas test in London Metro," *BBC Monitoring*, April 16, 2018, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1dp2xz8>.

States to explain experiments with biological and chemical weapons in Georgia, and that Russian officials “gave an ultimatum to Washington that Moscow will not tolerate the housing or experimentation of such weapons near its border.”⁸²

Gaytandzhieva was again featured in a pro-Russian media platform when journalist credentials enabled her to attend a session of the European Parliament in March 2018. She confronted a US government official, Robert Kadlec, and demanded to know “Why has the Pentagon been operating military bio-laboratories in 25 countries, bordering on the US rivals Russia, China and Iran, and why has the number of deadly upgrades in all those countries increased dramatically since the start of the military program of the United States in these countries?”⁸³

February 12, 2018

Under a peculiar URL, “Boeing Is Back – Biological War Conspiracy,” an ostensible Russian journalist published a very unusual compilation of material titled “The undeclared biological war of the USA against Russia, Part 3.” (It has not been possible to locate Parts 1 or 2). The author begins by writing that “Ukraine has ... been massively infected with botulism.” This is followed in sequence by:

- an excerpt from the “Capabilities Report 2012, West Desert Test Center,” showing that “Botulism neurotoxin” was being “produced and stored for research testing at Dugway”
- an excerpt from the “1977 US Army Report, pg 135, “listing tests at Dugway between June 1951 and March 1963, one of which was for “Clostridium botulinum toxin”
- a claim that DTRA “which implements US military programs at the Lugar Center in Georgia, has already conducted field trials with an unknown substance in Chechnya. In the spring of 2017 local residents reported [the] spraying [of] white powder near the Georgian border with an unmanned aerial vehicle.” Since Chechnya is territory inside the borders of Russia, that is difficult to understand. The author then writes that “DTRA has

⁸² Joaquin Flores “Confirmed: U.S. Creating Biological Weapons in Tbilisi, Georgia – Russia Orders ‘Stop,’” *Ford Russ News*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.fort-russ.com/2018/10/confirmed-u-s-creating-biological-weapons-in-tbilisi-georgia-russia-orders-stop/>.

⁸³ “Bulgarian journalist Gaytandzhieva confronts Robert Kadlec over the US secret bio-weapons,” *The Balkans Post*, March 11, 2018, <http://balkanspost.com/article/468/bulgarian-journalist-gaytandzhieva-confronts-kadlec-over-us-secret-bio-weapons>.

full access to the border between Russian and Georgia, provided through a military program called the Georgia Land Border Security Project,” and he asks “What could drones spray in Chechnya, and what threatens Russia with this?” His reply is a survey of DOD-funded molecular genetic research:

- The “DARPA Safe Gene Program to alter the genomes of insects, rodents and bacteria”
- The DARPA “Insect Allies” gene editing project
- The DARPA “Ecological Niche-preference Engineering gene editing project
- Unidentified JASON “classified research”
- \$820 million in alleged US funding for synthetic biology research between 2008 and 2014
- A USAF grant to obtain “Synovial tissue/RNA samples” from individuals in the Caucasus region of Russia.

Given the material gathered, this catalog very strongly suggests that the compilation was composed by someone very unlikely to be a Russian “journalist.”

“So we have come to the most terrible biological weapon that may have already been used in Russia, in the Chechen Republic. Until recently, ethnic biological weapons (biogenetic weapons) were theoretical weapons, the purpose of which is, first of all, to harm people of certain ethnic groups or genotypes. Although officially the research and development of ethnic bio-weapons has never been publicly confirmed, documents show that the United States collects biological materials from certain ethnic groups – Russians and Chinese.”⁸⁴

April 17, 2018

A review published by the *Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor* summarized Russian-sponsored allegations against the Lugar Center in Georgia:

⁸⁴ Alexander Nikishin, “The undeclared biological war of the USA against Russia, Part 3” February 12, 2018.

- Onishchenko’s charges in 2016 that the DTRA supported institutions in former Soviet republics were part of a US BW program, and that US microbiologists in Georgia could infect mosquitos with the Zika virus.
- In 2016, several Armenian publications blamed the Lugar Center in Georgia “for the death of more than ten people from swine flu (HNI).” Azerbaijani and Kazakhstani publications also published accusations against the Georgian facility despite the fact that the US had funded a similar Central Reference Laboratory in Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- Journalists in Dagestan wrote that the Georgian facility had “dispersed biological weapons in Dagestan and Chechnya,” both of which are areas within Russia.

The Jamestown author postulated that Russia makes these false allegations as “a useful justification for putting additional pressure on its post-Soviet neighbors as well as an asymmetric tool in its confrontation with the west. ... in recent years Russia repeatedly used supposed bacterial or biological threats in order to impose economic sanctions on several neighboring states.”⁸⁵

April 19, 2018

A Georgian publication attempted to debunk some of the past Russian government BW disinformation, as well as providing evidence of the openness of the Lugar Center. It began by listing some of the past Russian or Russian government sponsored allegations.

- In the summer of 2015, the Russian TV Channel *Rossiya 24* had reported that Georgia and Ukraine “had been hit by a mysterious disease...killing livestock and destroying lives,” and blamed the United States. They found a pig farmer who attributed the disease to “the US funded bio-laboratories in the two countries.” The Georgian facility was also labeled “a secret Pentagon station” and a “nest of viruses.” In reality, the bacteria that caused the swine deaths had been identified and contained by veterinarians working together with the microbiologists from the Georgian facilities.

⁸⁵ Nurlan Aliyev “Amidst ‘Chemical’ Confrontation in Syria, Russia Looks for US Biological Weapons in Former Soviet Republics,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12, #58, April 17, 2018.

- The Sputnik news agency described the Lugar Center as “part of the US effort to encircle the country with bio-weapons facilities.”
- Another Russian SVR proxy site, “New Eastern Outlook,” claimed that the Lugar Center was a “front ... for testing new viruses and bacteria on the Georgian population.
- A pro-Kremlin Georgian language site repeated the old charge that the Center was responsible for outbreaks of measles and other diseases.
- Earlier in 2018, Russian sources blamed the Lugar Center for the spread of the insect plant pest called a “stink bug.”
- The Georgian pro-Moscow Patriot TV station featured an American living in the Georgian capital (also interviewed on the Rossiya TV program) who claimed that the Lugar Center was “being used to test killer viruses and bacteria on humans...Georgians are being used as white rats.”
- There have even been allegations that the Lugar Center was producing chemical weapons sent to Syria.⁸⁶

To counter this deluge of Russian government-sponsored propaganda, a small Georgian NGO named the Media Development Foundation visited the Lugar Center. They were shown the storage area for “Especially Dangerous Pathogens” and learned that most of the culture collection it housed dated from the Soviet period and had been left behind by Soviet scientists. During the Soviet years, the culture collection had been located at an older Soviet research institute located in the center of Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital and largest city, a far more problematical location. Much of the work at the Center was the same as it had carried out during the Soviet years: identifying and responding to disease outbreaks. Several years earlier, the Center had hosted a visit by Russian journalists, and Russian scientists had worked at the Center since its initiation in 2013. However, neither the Russian scientists nor journalists would comment for the Georgian publication in 2018. Instead, two days later, a Russian headline read “US laboratory for biological weapons found in Georgia,” and Russian Duma member Franz

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Klintsevich suggested that perhaps the Novichok agent used in March 2018 in Salisbury, UK, had been stored in Georgia and Ukraine.⁸⁷

June 10, 2018

On June 10, 2018, the Russian *Sputnik* news agency announced that the Lugar Center was “ready to receive Russian experts to inspect the US funded...center” as well as a Sputnik correspondent. Nothing further was heard about such a visit. However, earlier the same week, “Major General Igor Kirillov, the commander of the Russian Armed Forces Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops said that the United States was using labs in Georgia, including those at the Lugar Center, and had tested toxic substances on local residents in attempts to research ways to deliver and unleash biological agents in breach of international accords.”⁸⁸

September 18, 2018

Dozh [Rain], an independent Russian online video channel, carried a program titled “Fake News” devoted to debunking official Russian government material. It stated that postings by *Russia Today* often cite evidence from “foreign media,” which were neither foreign nor from “media.” As examples, it cited an American named Scott Bennet, an ex-convict from Florida who frequently appears on *RT* as an “expert” on multiple subjects, and Alexander Pokrovsky, a Russian “poet” who appeared as one of two experts commenting on the Lugar Center in Georgia.⁸⁹

September 16 to September 25, 2018

During one week in late September 2018, a remarkable series of “disclosures” were made by former Georgian Minister of State Security Igor Giorgadze. A graduate of the KGB training academy in Moscow in 1973, Giorgadze served as a member of the Soviet KGB and fought in a KGB unit in Afghanistan with Soviet forces. He served as minister of state security in Georgia between 1993 to 1995. He was apparently involved in an assassination attempt against Georgian

⁸⁷ “Does the US Have a Secret Germ Warfare Lab on Russia’s Doorstep? The Story of a Kremlin Disinformation campaign in Georgia”. Giorgi Lomsadze , April 19, 2018.

⁸⁸ Georgia Ready to Allow Russian Experts to Inspect Lugar Center,” *Sputnik International*, June 10, 2018.

⁸⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFxDWfFERqk>.

President Edward Shevardnadze on August 29, 1995, and within five days, he had arrived in Moscow. Since then, while residing in Moscow he has led a pro-Russian opposition group in the Georgian government.⁹⁰ Georgian press commentary in 2018 stated that “Shevardnadze was forced by Moscow to have [Giorgadze] as minister in his government.”

Giorgadze presented two sets of allegations, accompanied in both cases by documents: one set Georgian, and the second set, US patents. Giorgadze claimed that the Lugar Center “could be a cover for a bioweapons lab used for disturbing experiments that [are] banned in the US,” and that placing the facility “under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Health Ministry... was to avoid the growing public concern on the real tasks of this lab.”⁹¹ The Georgian documents that Giorgadze released showed that thirty patients with hepatitis C had died after being treated with Sofosbuvir, sold under the brand name Sovaldi, the same charged earlier aired by Silverman. The medication results in cure rates varying between 30 to 97 percent depending on the type of hepatitis C virus that the patient has. None of the documents did more than record deaths, and provided no information on the state of health of those who had died, but Giorgadze referred to “Sovaldi pathogens,” and *RT* referred to the patients who had died as “human lab rats.” The Russian Defense Ministry stated that it would conduct an investigation. “The documents suggest possible violations of the [Biological Weapons Convention] by the U.S. side, which ratified it in 1972 [sic].”

The second group of documents contained a large number of US patents for rather bizarre devices which could allegedly deliver viruses, bacteria, toxins, or mosquitos which could allegedly do the same. All of the patents belonged to a single person, and there is no evidence whatsoever that any of the patents bear any relation to the Lugar Center. Giorgadze presents none, saying only “It is still unclear what exact role the Lugar Center played in the development of such weaponry.” He might as well have asked whether Rip Van Winkle or Captain Ahab had played a role in the origin of the patents. Giorgadze even offered that he did “not rule out that the documents might be very elaborate fakes,” and *RT* noted that it “could not independently verify

⁹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igor_Giorgadze

⁹¹ “Deadly experiments: Georgian ex-minister claims US funded facility may be bioweapons lab,” *RT*, September 16, 2018; “‘US-funded’ Lugar Center in Georgia May be Bioweapons Lab – Ex Minister,” *Sputnik International*, September 16, 2018.

the authenticity of the documents presented by Giorgadze.”⁹² The patents do in fact exist, and for several days they were widely reproduced and discussed on multiple sites on the internet.⁹³

Several days later, no less than the Director of the Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Vladimir Yermakov, used the materials released by Giorgadze to hold a press conference at the offices of *Sputnik*. The headline for the press conference read “Moscow Suspects US of Testing Bio Weapons on Russian Border, Warns Washington.” Yermakov said:

we will not allow your [American] military biologists to do something vague on Russian Borders. What is happening in Georgia, according to our assessment is the work of the US Department of Defense on Georgian territory with biological material, the use of our neighbor, our Georgian colleagues, partners, as guinea pigs.⁹⁴

The Russian Ministry of Defense weighed in using the same Giorgadze documents a week later, in the person of General Igor Kirillov, the head of the Russian Radiation, Chemical, and Biological Defense Forces. He stated that “The almost simultaneous deaths of a large number of volunteers [the hepatitis patients] implies that the Lugar Center was testing a highly toxic chemical or highly lethal biological agent under the guise of [medical] treatment.” The *RT* headline read “Dozens of Georgians likely killed by US toxin or bioweapon.”⁹⁵ Paradoxically, Kirillov also correctly said that “the medication being tested was ‘Sovaldi,’” and admitted that Giorgadze had provided the documentation that he was quoting. The story was distributed

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Since these patents and their inventions display many curious aspects, they are worth some attention. The assignee of the patents posted by Giorgadze is identified as S. Mill Calvert and a firm TMARS Associates located in Manassas, Virginia. “TMARS” are the first letters of one of the patents (Toxic Mosquito Aerosol Release System), and the Old Calvert Mill is an historic US building located in Manassas. There are a great many patents under the name of S. Mill Calvert, but the most important one for Giorgadze’s “disclosures,” the device to release mosquitos that could be used as biological weapons, would almost certainly not work for multiple reasons. A device does not necessarily have to work or be demonstrated to work in order to be granted a patent. The most important consideration for the US Patent Office is that the application should demonstrate that the invention is unique and has not previously been patented. The inventor may then claim many potential applications, whether they might ever be envisioned or not. Many patents therefore insert descriptions of use for the delivery of chemical or biological agents in order to cover all potential eventualities. It is irrelevant for the purpose of patent application that international treaties such as the BWC or the CWC exist.

⁹⁴ *Sputnik*, September 25, 2018.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

worldwide, picked up among very many others, by *Deutsche Welle*, AP news, a newspaper in Minnesota, a Hindi newspaper, *The Moscow Times*, Yahoo News, *South Front*, and multiple Russian web sites and media outlets. Kirillov's intervention was made just a few hours after it became known that Russian government hackers had attempted to penetrate the computers of the OPCW, which was investigating the Russian government's use of the Novichok agent in the Skripal assassination attempt in the United Kingdom.⁹⁶

Another Russian publication provided a much fuller report of Kirillov's presentation, which charged that the United States "was highly likely boosting its military and biological potential under the cover of peace research."

"The United States is consistently increasing its biological potential and control of national collections of pathogenic microorganisms not only in the former Soviet republics. More than 30 US-controlled laboratories with a high level of biological protection are functioning and are being constantly modernized today, which has been confirmed by official UN data," Maj. Gen. Igor Kirillov said.

He said US bio labs are a constant source of biological threats to Russia and China.

The official stated that the Russian Defense Ministry was aware of the United States researching ways to deliver and unleash biological weapons in breach of international accords, stressing that there were images of munitions the United States considered using to deliver chemical and biological agents.

This is in line with the US concept of 'contactless warfare'... They [images] show how capsules can be filled with poisonous, radioactive, or narcotic substances, and pathogens. Such munitions are not listed among conventional or humane weapons, while any publishing of such data runs against international accords on nonproliferation of biological weapons. ...

⁹⁶ "Ministry of Defense 73 people died in Georgia because of experiments in the Center of Lugar," RIA Novosti, October 4, 2018; "Russia claims US tested biological weapons in Georgia, killing 73, *Deutsche Welle*, October 4, 2018

The Lugar Center is only a small element of the extensive US military biological program. Vigorous activity has been launched on the territory of the states adjacent to Russian, where the Pentagon-controlled laboratories also function.”⁹⁷

Kirillov was unquestionably referring to the semi-bizarre US patents displayed by Giorgadze, none of which are a US munition, or were ever “considered” for a US munition, and none of which have any connection to the Lugar Center or to any US program. Nevertheless, Kirillov went on to explicitly quote the materials released by Giorgadze.

“The published materials allow us to take a fresh look at the biological situation in the south of Russia. --- to examine the situation around the African swine fever in 2007-2018, which spread from Georgia to the territory of the Russian Federation, European countries and China. Strains of the ASF virus identical to the Georgia-2007 strain were found in samples from dead animals in these countries.

...the fact that the Gilead Sciences drug, Sovaldi, caused no deaths in Russia, suggests that a toxic chemical was tested on Georgian citizens under the guise of medical treatment.

An analysis of the materials provided by [former Georgian State Security Minister] Igor Giorgadze is a matter of concern for the Russian Defense Ministry as it gives evidence that the United States is highly likely continuing to increase its military-biological potential, carrying out its activities.”

In this instance, a US DOD spokesman, Eric Pahon, told *Sputnik* that “The US is not developing biological weapons in the Lugar Center. These are also not US facilities... The Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research is owned and operated by the Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC).”⁹⁸ This was an extremely unfortunate but typical

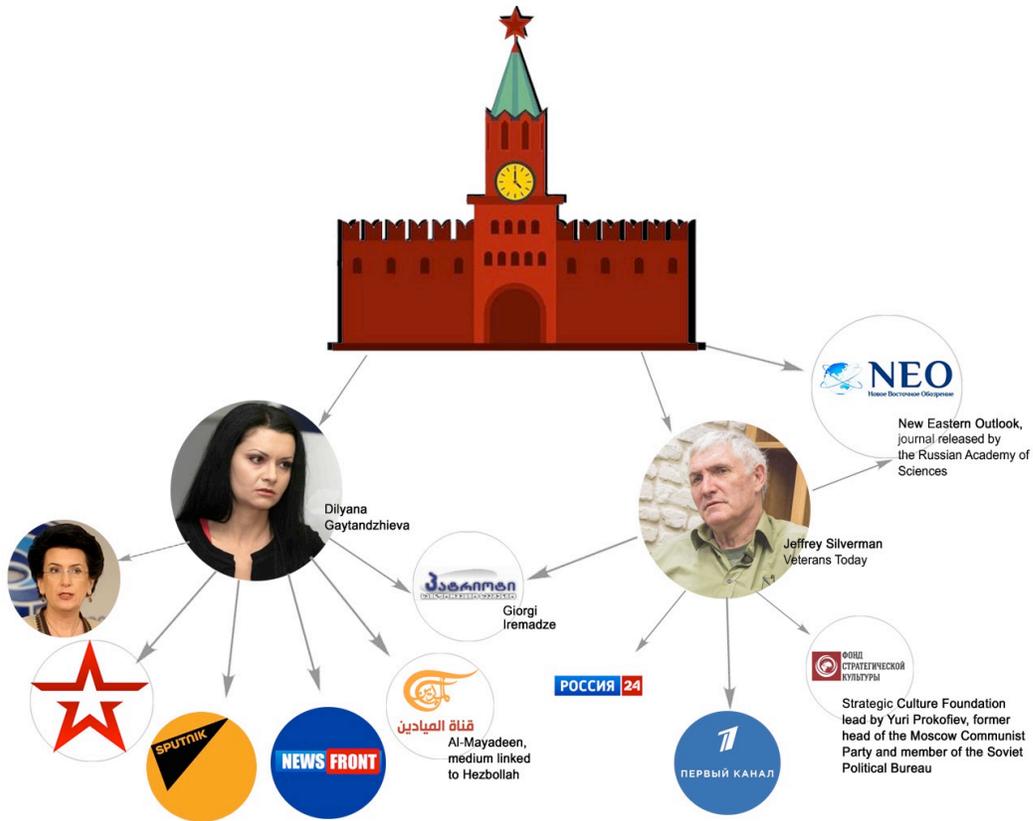
⁹⁷“Russia Says US Boosting Number of Labs Close to IT, Pentagon Denies Accusation,” *Sputnik News*, October 4, 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/world/201810041068590548-us-controlled-labs/>.

⁹⁸ “Russia says US Boosting Number of Labs Close to It, Pentagon Denies Accusation,” *Sputnik*, October 4, 2018.

lost opportunity for a US government official to do a line-by-line debunking of General Kirillov's disinformation.

At the end of September and beginning of October 2018, two European organizations responded to the most recent Russian government BW disinformation releases by displaying how these operations were organized. Their investigation focused on a particular example, the releases between September 5 and September 25, 2018, made by fourteen different Russian or allied media outlets that reiterated each other's stories, keeping a chain of essentially the same story initially published under the names of Silverman or Gaytandzhieva in circulation. The fourteen examples clearly indicate that the compilation of summaries that is provided in this paper, despite their number, represents only a small fraction of the BW disinformation stories carried by Russian TV, print and on-line venues, certainly during 2018.

Example of Russian media disinformation process during a three-week period, September 2018



Additional

example of short period of multimedia disinformation distribution, September 2018



Both images were produced by the MYTH DETECTOR LAB, in Tbilisi, Georgia, supported by USAID.

Kremlin proxy media sites, “news agencies,” blogs that distributed the BW disinformation⁹⁹

Global Research	Alia	USA Really
Russia Insider	Russia Insight	Africa Daily Voice
Veterans Today	Russia Front	Afrique Panorama
RT	News Front	Internet Research Agency [IRA]
Sputnik	South Front	New Eastern Outlook
Sputnik International	East Front	Project Lakhta
Media Sniper	Nevsky News	Strategic Culture Foundation (runs Veterans Today)
Russia Observer	Economy Today	Stalker Zone
Tsargrad TV	Federal News Agency [FAN] (runs USA Really)	Zero Hedge
The Eurasia Daily (EADaily)		
GEORGIAN PROXIES	Euronews	
Possibly independent organization: The Historical Perspectives Foundation		

Some of these proxy Russian government publications are reportedly funded by the SVR, and others by the media division of Putin’s presidential administration, formerly headed by Vladislav Surkov. These funding mechanisms are reportedly deliberately kept opaque.¹⁰⁰ All these media and TV outlets are Russian government propaganda outlets: the Putin government took over or

⁹⁹ In October 2017 a book titled *Putin’s Praetorians: The Top Kremlin Trolls Confess* was published. It contained individual essays by publishers, editors or writers for *Global Research*, *Veterans Today*, *Russia Insider*, *Russia Observer* as well as RT and *Sputnik*, and claimed in an additional disinformation exercise that they were “a unique movement...one of the most effective social crusading moments in history...a spontaneous popular reaction against what is demonstrably a pack of lies.” Authors included in the book then wrote “reviews” of the book, posted them on Amazon and other sites, which were then reprinted by Russian disinformation outlets such as *Russia Insight*, *Russia Insider*, and *News Front*. (“Putin’s Praetorians: Trolls Write It, Trolls Promote It,” DFRLab [Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab], October 30, 2017.)

¹⁰⁰ Mark Kramer, personal communication, January 17, 2020.

closed down all independent TV stations in a few years after taking office in 2000. To this must be added the Kremlin’s “troll factories” such as the Internet Research Agency, active on social media platforms. In the words of the UK Integrity Initiative, “What the Kremlin is overseeing is not simply ‘fake news, it is the organized production of disinformation on an industrial scale’.”¹⁰¹

In July 2020, the Global Engagement Center of the US Department of State produced a seventy-five-page report that is the most detailed and informative analysis available of a group of disinformation platforms produced directly by Russian government intelligence agencies and others closely affiliated with the Russian government. The seven were the *Strategic Culture Foundation*, *New Eastern Outlook*, *Global Research*, *News Front*, *South Front*, *Geopolitica.ru* and *Katehon*. *Global Research*, based in Canada, poses as an independent entity, but is almost certainly not. It maintains relationships with the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, the SVR. *Geopolitica.ru* is the platform of “ultranationalist” Alexander Dugin, and *Katehon*—a subsidiary of Tsargrad—is the platform of Konstantin Malofeyev, a Russian oligarch who claims to be a monarchist but is a Putin ally who has funded the Russian-supported forces that invaded Eastern Ukraine and continue fighting a war there.¹⁰² All these platforms distributed disinformation on many subjects, as well as in 2020 on the coronavirus pandemic.

Different Russian intelligence agencies support some of these platforms directly, and retired generals of the intelligence agencies as well as former and current senior assistants to Putin serve on the boards of the seven platforms. The Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF) was founded in 2005 and is directed by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, SVR, as is *News Front* and the other “Front” platforms. In 2010–11, the SCF formed a partnership with Global Research, and more recently with a Chinese platform, the 4th Media, renamed The 21st Century. SCF also maintains relations with *Katehon*. The journal *International Affairs*, produced by the Russian

¹⁰¹ “The Integrity Initiative Guide to Countering Russian Disinformation” This is no longer available online as its host site had to be closed after being hacked, presumably by Russian entities or their proxies. Emphasis added. See also Dmitry Volchek, “Inside the ‘Propaganda Kitchen’ – A Former Russian ‘Troll Factory’ Employee Speaks Out,” RFE/RL, January 29, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-troll-factory-hacking/31076160.html>.

¹⁰² US Department of State, *GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, GEC, August 2020, https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USSTATEBPA/2020/08/05/file_attachments/1512230/Pillars%20of%20Russias%20Disinformation%20and%20Propaganda%20Ecosystem_08-04-20%20%281%29.pdf.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs,¹⁰³ has now also formed a partnership with the SCF. Igor Shchegolov, Putin's former assistant and a member of Putin's Security Council, is Malofeyev's longtime associate. The supervisory board of Malofeyev's *Katehon* includes

Sergey Glazyev, President Vladimir Putin's former economic advisor and currently a Minister in charge of Integration and Macroeconomics at the Eurasian Economic Commission...Andrey Klimov, Deputy Chair of the Russian Federation Council Committee on Foreign Affairs ...[and] Leonid Reshetnikov, a retired Lieutenant-General of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service.¹⁰⁴

Another example of the incestuous nature of these relationships begins with Konstantin Knyrik, very likely a GRU officer who was involved in the Russian operations to seize Crimea and then fought in the Eastern Ukraine.

Knyrik and other *News Front* leaders, including its General Director Yuriy Fedin and chief anchor Sergei Veselovsky, are affiliated with the Russian ultra-nationalist Rodina party, founded by the US-sanctioned Russian politician Dmitriy Rogozin.... Knyrik's page on the Russian social media platform VKontakte features many photographs of Knyrik and another US-sanctioned Russian politician connected to Rodina, Sergey Glazyev, former advisor to President Putin... *News Front's* co-founder Mikhail Sinelin is Glazyev's brother-in-law ... RFE/RL reported that Sinelin was former deputy chairman of the Russian state-owned bank Vnesheconombank and worked for about ten years in the secretariats of the Russian vice prime minister and prime minister.¹⁰⁵

Many of these platforms repost each other's postings, as well as those of *RT* and *Sputnik TV*. Between them, they also post on a wide variety of social media platforms—Facebook, YouTube, GAB, Pinterest, V Kontakte, Twitter, Instagram—and in multiple languages. One of these platforms alone, *News Front*, posted on:

¹⁰³ This publication should not be confused with Oxford University Press journal of a similar name.

¹⁰⁴ US Department of State, *GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁵ US Department of State, *GEC Special Report: Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, p. 35.

- VKontakte, in English, French, Bulgarian, Russian, Georgian, Serbian, and Spanish
- Facebook, all the above plus German
- Twitter, six of the above
- YouTube, all of the above

plus two smaller social media sites.

Between all seven disinformation platforms and all the languages in which they post on all the social media sites that they use there are well over 100 different outlets. Postings on *Global Research* are often reproduced by *Sputnik* and *RT*, and from there they are distributed in additional languages.

On the day after Giorgadze’s release of documents in September 2018, Gaytandzhieva released a large number of email messages between several senior Georgian health officials and US government officials which concerned the American military scientists working at the Lugar Center. The messages had been hacked. Like the American patents released by Giorgadze, the email messages bore no relation to the charge that Gaytandzhieva used them for, namely that “US diplomats were involved in trafficking of human blood and pathogens for secret military programs.” Her article and images of the Georgian emails were shown on *Al Mayadeen TV*, a pro-Assad and pro-Hezbollah TV station based in Beirut, Lebanon. They were then shown on *Zvezda*, a Russian nationwide TV network run by the Russian Ministry of Defense, and following that published in Bulgarian print media, 80 percent of which is reportedly controlled by a pro-Russian oligarch, Delyan Peevski. Finally, the material was carried by *Zero Hedge*, a site which poses as an English-language finance blog but which frequently features pro-Putin, pro-Assad, and anti-US content. The *Zero Hedge* posts are written under the pseudonym “Tyler Durden,” the name of a fictional character in a novel. It turned out that blog items written by “Tyler Durden” were actually composed by three different individuals. The debunking study was published by the *Myth Detector Lab*, produced by the Media Development Foundation, a small Georgian organization funded in part by the US Agency for International Development.¹⁰⁶ *Zero Hedge* has about 670,000 Twitter followers and millions visitors to its blog.

¹⁰⁶ “How Kremlin Tries to Cover up Russian Trace in Skripal Case with Lugar Laboratory,” *Myth Detector*, September 28, 2018.

A second debunking effort was published by the European Union but was quite limited in scope. It noted that “conspiracy theories are on average six to nine times more frequent now [2018] than they were in 2011 in Russian media.” In regard to the Lugar Center in Georgia, while referring the reader to the *Myth Detector* study as well as the April 2018 one described earlier, they made only two interesting points. Russian disinformation releases constantly repeat that the Lugar Center is funded by the United States, by US Department of Defense Funds, is directed by the US Department of Defense and so on. The United States had provided \$350 million for the construction and equipment for the Center, as well as for the other smaller affiliated former Soviet facilities in Georgia. But starting in 2018, Georgia provided all the funding for the Center and its network of associated sites. The Russian government had itself contributed funds to a similar US-supported facility in Armenia, although that facility subsequently also became a target of Russian disinformation attacks, but to a far lesser to a lesser degree than the Georgian facility.¹⁰⁷

A publication on October 12, 2018, by a Georgian official reviewed some of the just surveyed attempts to rebut Russian disinformation but disclosed more bizarre aspects of some of the Russian government efforts. The *Sputnik* news network and particularly the Russian REN TV would carry stories and interviews with elderly Georgian women who described terrible and dangerous smells coming from the Lugar Center, and that “from 2014 the lab unleashed giant mosquitos and bats carrying viral infections across Georgia. These tales tend to be laced with images of dead animals, biohazard signs and spooky video effects and sci-fi horror tropes.” REN TV also carried an interview with Silverman in which he claimed that “the U.S. will use bioweapons developed in Georgia to depopulate the Middle East and take over its oil.”¹⁰⁸ Silverman, who served as a regular propaganda “source” for multiple Russian government TV networks and other media outlets, was described by REN TV “as a bona-fide American whistleblower.”

¹⁰⁷ “Tailored for Disinformation Heavy Users: Conspiracy Theories on Biological Weapons,” *EU vs. Disinfo*, October 4, 2018

¹⁰⁸ Giorgi Lomsadze, “Moscow Stirs Fears of American Germs,” *Eurasianet*, October 12, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/moscow-stirs-fear-of-american-germs>.

In 2013, *Veterans Today* developed a relationship with what had previously been a reputable academic journal, *New Eastern Outlook (NEO)*, published by the Institute of Oriental Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences. *NEO* began publishing BW disinformation written by Silverman and taken from *Veterans Today*, as well as other disinformation pieces written by Gordon Duff, the editor of *Veterans Today*. In a radio interview in 2012, Duff said “About 30% of what’s written in *Veterans Today* is patently false. About 40% of what I write is at least purposely, partially false. Because if I didn’t write false information, I wouldn’t be alive.”¹⁰⁹ *The Myth Detector* also noted that Silverman also writes for *USA Really*, which is a product of Yevgeny Prigozhin’s St. Petersburg “troll factory,” the Internet Research Agency, which takes one directly back to Putin’s Kremlin staff. *Veterans Today* frequently cites the Strategic Culture Foundation as its source, an organization located in Moscow headed by Uri Prokofiev, a former head of the Moscow Communist Party.¹¹⁰ It is not likely that the FSB or SVR could have forced an institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences to allow its journal to be converted into a disinformation publication, but an office in the Kremlin could. Roughly one-quarter of the names of contributors to *New Eastern Outlook* are pseudonyms for disinformation experts from Russia’s Internet Research Agency (for example, “Henry Kamens”).¹¹¹

Veterans Today describes itself as a “Military Foreign Affairs Policy Journal for Clandestine Services,”¹¹² that is, in theory, veterans of US intelligence agencies. *News Front*, as already noted is a direct proxy of the SVR. Information releases by the US Department of the Treasury in relation to sanctions applied against various Russian entities for interfering in the 2016 US presidential elections provided information about the network of Russian government disinformation fronts that included *Veterans Today*, *USA Really*, and Silverman. Silverman had moved from writing for *Veterans Today* to *USA Really*, and the latter “publication” had substantially taken over the operations of the former. It was created by Alexander Malkevich and was just one of a chain of entities that were parts of “Project Lakhta,” which included the Internet Research Agency, Nevskiy News LLC, Economy Today LLC, and the Federal News

¹⁰⁹ Wikipedia entry for *Veterans Today*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veterans_Today.

¹¹⁰ Undated postings, updated in 2020, by *Myth Detector*. See also, “Two Conspiracy Theories about Swine Flu Promoted by Editor of Russia-affiliated *Veterans Today*,” *Myth Detector*, January 18, 2019.

¹¹¹ Personal communication, October 26, 2019.

¹¹² Wikipedia entry for *Veterans Today*.

Agency (FAN). All of these have been traced back to an organization nominally managed by a former GRU officer, Victor Boyarkin, who works for the Russian oligarch, Oleg Deripaska. Malkevich, Boyarkin and Deripaska have all been placed under US government sanctions.¹¹³ Project Lakhta, Deripaska etc. essentially serve as a cut-out for Kremlin operations assumed to be directed by immediate assistants to Putin working in the presidential administration.

Mark Kramer notes “The presidential administration under Putin has been functioning as a kind of central party apparatus as in Soviet times, overseeing a great deal of the official propaganda and disinformation. Surkov was the one who blazed the trail on this, and it’s intensified under his successors. The SVR and FSB efforts reinforce those of the presidential administration, especially overseas....the huge complex housing presidential administration on Staraya Ploschad a short distance from the Kremlin was until 1991 the headquarters of the Communist Party apparatus.”¹¹⁴

On July 24, 2020 and August 6, 2020, the US Department of State released extremely useful information on the relationship between the various Russian military and civilian intelligence agencies and their proprietary disinformation outlets, whose products are reviewed in this study. The first occasion was a press briefing which previewed the information that followed in a report released by the Department of State on August 6. The information revealed that the military GRU directed *One World Press InfoRos* and *InfoBrics.org* and almost certainly also *Global Research*. The SVR directed the *Strategic Culture Foundation*, which as indicated earlier, also controlled two additional disinformation outlets. Although the products of Gaytandzhieva were not specifically mentioned, the most likely assumption would be that the material that was published under her name would be supplied by either the GRU or the SVR.¹¹⁵ *Global Research* had a total of 12.4 million page views, averaging 351,247 views per posting. “One false story by *Global Research* claiming that the coronavirus pandemic was not real was then spread by 70

¹¹³ US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Targets Russian Operatives over Election Interference, World Anti-Doping Agency Hacking and Other Malign Activities,” Press Releases, December 18, 2018. Lacklan Markay, “Google Yanks Services from Russian Propaganda Site,” [Re: *USA Really*], *The Daily Beast*, February 7, 2019; Amy Mackinnon, “The Evolution of a Russian Troll” [Re: Alexander Malkevich], *ForeignPolicy.com*, July 10, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Mark Kramer, personal communications, January 17 and 19, 2020.

¹¹⁵ J.E. Barnes and D.F. Sanger, “To Influence Americans in Election Year, Russia Spreads Fake Virus Data,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2020.

other sites and publications.”¹¹⁶ *News Front* totaled 9 million views and *South Front* had 4.3 million. The *Strategic Culture Foundation* itself had only 990,000 viewers.

September 8, 2018

Writing in *Sputnik Latvia*, Alexander Khrolenko wrote:

Baltic states help Pentagon invent biological weapons for World War III- they are assigned the role of guinea pigs

Mosaic outbreaks of African swine fever (ASF) in Eastern Europe are gradually developing into the general picture of the training ground at which the Pentagon is working out the strategy and tactics of the third world war (biological). Probably, in this coordinate system a special role is assigned to the eastern vanguard of NATO- the Baltic countries, which can be sacrificed. Believe me there is no smell of conspiracy here- the facts are there.

The statistics of ASF incidence in the Baltic countries is paradoxical in that the atypical resistance of the African swine fever virus to the conditions of northern latitudes could be created only in laboratory conditions. And who could put such a “pig” in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia? I venture to seem unoriginal, but I suspect the Center for Biological Research of the Pentagon Fort Detrick, where decades have been improving the well-known and creating new pathogens of serious epidemic diseases.

Of course, ASF resistant viruses did not fall from the sky and were not delivered to the Baltic countries with African fruits. ASF outbreaks almost simultaneously lit up on a wide front- from Georgia to Ukraine and Moldova, Poland, the Baltic countries, and coincided with the emergence of a whole network of Pentagon biological laboratories in the post-Soviet space.

¹¹⁶ Julian E. Barnes, US Traces Russia Disinformation Network; Offers Reward to Curb Hacking,” *New York Times*, August 6, 2020. See also, US Department of State, GEC Special Report: *Pillars of Russia’s Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, August 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf and Michael Weiss, ed., *Inside the GRU’s Psychological Warfare Program*, Washington, DC: Free Russia Foundation, 2020, pp. 3-8, <https://michaelweissjournalist.com/f/aquarium-leaks-inside-the-grus-psychological-warfare-program>.

It seems that the north of Eurasia is the epicenter of all the most dangerous diseases of mankind. Otherwise, why did the virtuous Americans spend billions of dollars on the construction of a “protective cordon” in the form of dozens of military biological facilities in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Ukraine? Obviously, the Pentagon is studying the effects of new and mutated viruses in each specific region.

Created over 400 Pentagon biological laboratories around the world and a global monitoring system. They are developing and studying the effects of the latest types of viruses on humans- directly or indirectly through ASF and food insecurity.”¹¹⁷

This was the first mention of “400 Pentagon biological laboratories around the world;” others would follow.

October 3, 2018

The EU’s *Disinfo Review* provided a summary of an item carried by Mir24TV, dated October 3, 2018, one of the most bizarre in this compendium:

Cancer, syphilis and ‘Spanish flu’ are US biological weapons

Many Latin American leaders died because of cancer, most of them were against the US policy. The Nazi specialists were also developing biological weapons and some of them were caught by US special services. Therefore the epidemic of cancer could have been caused by an American biological weapon. The US is also linked to the development of syphilis and ‘Spanish flu’.”¹¹⁸

October 15, 2018

A Russian journalist published a rehash of the September 25 Giorgadze releases as well as the Russian Foreign Ministry and Defense Ministry commentaries. These were now described as “scandalous facts and documents” and were combined with Putin’s criticism of the collection of

¹¹⁷ Alexander Khrolenko, “The pig move: The Pentagon is working out a strategy for biological warfare in the Baltics,” *Sputnik Latvia*, September 8, 2018.

¹¹⁸ Mir24TV, October 3, 2018, in *Disinfo Review*, Issue #121, October 4, 2018.

“biological material” from Russian citizens. The journalist added a contribution of his own: “Maybe the Yankees are not really developing biological weapons there, just bringing biological weapons there and testing them.”¹¹⁹

November 6, 2018

Integrity Initiative, a debunking website supported by the British government, published an extremely detailed statistical survey of Russian disinformation stories in both Russian and English over a twelve month period from October 27, 2017 to October 27, 2018, with a particular focus on “Biological Weapons.”¹²⁰ The findings are by now recognizable:

similar stories appear regularly, always based on a set of false claims, usually accusing the U.S. of creating biological weapons close to Russian borders. The plot usually takes place in neighboring small countries, including the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Georgia. . . . These stories were most likely tailored for the Russian domestic audience. The Kremlin regurgitates the same old story, makes a few tweaks, and releases the story to a new audience with a new lease on life, frequently alleging US plans to use biological weapons against Russia.” Various stories also charged that the US military was “running biological weapons facilities in the countries adjacent to Russia, like Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan. . . .the narrative feeds perfectly into the image of Russia as a ‘surrounded fortress,’ often used by the Kremlin to rally the population together.”

The study judged that “The biological weapons stories that emerged throughout the past 12 months appear to be only the tip of the iceberg,” which is consistent with what this study strongly suggests.

November and December 2018

Georgian officials made a concerted effort, if not to convince Russian government authorities to put an end to years of disinformation about the Lugar Center in Georgia, at least to provide transparency to the international community. On July 24, 2018, Georgia invited representatives

¹¹⁹ Sergei Filatov, “US Conducting Experiments Near Russia’s Borders,” *International Affairs*, November 6, 2018.

¹²⁰ Lukas Andriukaitis, “‘Bioweapons’ story recycled for different countries by Kremlin propaganda,” *Integrity Initiative*, November 6, 2018.

of all BWC states parties to visit the Lugar Center. The Georgian government repeated the invitation in mid-August 2018 at a Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) Meeting of Experts in Geneva. On November 14–15, the Georgian Center for Disease Control and Public Health released a report of the visit, which was followed by an official report of the BTWC secretariat. The most important parts of the Georgian government’s report are the following:

1. The visiting team comprising 22 experts and observers visited the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research (Lugar Center) of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) on 14-15 November 2018. Access was provided to all areas of the site, including all spaces used by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), a tenant unit of the Lugar Center. The assessment was conducted by splitting the team into two groups, which both completed the same tour of the facility, including all BSL-2 laboratories. In addition, four experts from the visiting team accessed all areas of the BSL-3 laboratory.
2. The methods applied by the team included: visual examination of laboratory activities and equipment, mechanical systems storage and administrative areas, infrastructure and laboratory personnel; demonstration of the Pathogen Asset Control System (PACS); and procedures for pathogens and toxins control and transfer. Information provided [by the Georgian government] in the 2018 Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) submission and other information provided, as well as that observed during the visit was taken into account.
3. The size of the laboratory areas, number of personnel, scientific disciplines represented in the scientific/engineering staff, and information on types of pathogens and toxins handled and studied in the facility were consistent with the information provided in the CBMs and other information provided to the visiting team....
10. The facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities. The visiting team observed nothing that was inconsistent with prophylactic, protective and other peaceful purposes.¹²¹

¹²¹ Peer Review Transparency Visit Exercise 14-15 November 2018, Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research National Center for Disease Control and Public Health Tbilisi, Georgia.

The Working Paper formally submitted by Georgia and other states parties to the Biological Weapons Convention was simply a more elaborate and formal international document but said much the same.¹²²

On November 12, 2018, the *BBC* also released a short documentary dealing with the Lugar Center and the Russian government's allegations against it. The *BBC* filmed inside the building, although unfortunately very little of the film was devoted to the laboratory suites. While General Kirillov had stated in his filmed interview that two of the five floors in the building were given over to the US military, the *BBC* team found no floors given over to the US military, and the international visiting delegation had been shown the suites that the US WRAIR scientists worked in. Kirillov and the Russian Ministry of Defense knew of course that he was lying outright. The Russian visitors to the site, who have been described previously and who are described further below, would unquestionably have informed the Russian authorities of this several years before Kirillov spoke.

A substantial portion of the *BBC* film was devoted to Giorgadze and his documents, both those concerning the deaths of hepatitis patients and the US patents, including the one showing the drones for mosquito delivery. When asked by the *BBC* "Isn't this simply disinformation?," Giorgadze falsely denied having said that the patents had anything to do with the Lugar Center. When the *BBC* repeated the question, Giorgadze replied, "I don't know; I don't know." However, General Kirillov, in his filmed remarks, had carried things a step further in relation to the patents. Kirillov stated "These documents prove...." When Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marie Zakharova was also shown Giorgadze's hepatitis documents in the *BBC* film and was told "There is no evidence," she archly replied, "You know, if there is no evidence

¹²² Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. 3 December 2018 English Only. 2018 Meeting. Geneva, 4-7 December 2018. Item 7 of the provisional agenda: Consideration of the factual reports of the Meetings of Experts reflecting their deliberations, including possible outcomes. Building Confidence through Transparency: Peer Review Transparency Visit at the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health in Tbilisi, Georgia. Submitted by Georgia and Germany, co-sponsored by Austria, Belgium. Columbia, Iraq, Hungary, Malaysia, Malta, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. See also, "Experts from 17 countries visit the Lugar Center in Tbilisi," *JAM News*, November 19, 2018.

right now, that is not proof that there is no evidence, right?” More importantly, when asked why Russian government officials didn’t participate in the visit to the Lugar Center together with the delegation of other BWC states parties, Zakharova replied, “There is a difference between a visit and an inspection. We don’t want to ‘visit’ ... We are not interested in visiting, like a museum excursion.” The 2018 states parties’ visit was scarcely “a museum excursion,” and of course the Russian government had been explicitly invited to come to the facility in 2013 by Gamkrelidze in a *carte blanche* invitation to which it never so much as bothered to reply.¹²³

In the last portion of the *BBC* film, the journalist asked Elizabeth Read, the deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Tbilisi, “Why does Russia do this?,” that is, produce such gross and patently false BW disinformation. Read offered a single reply: “In order to divert attention from their own bad behavior and create a smokescreen.” In 2018, this presumably referred to the Skripal-Novichok events in the United Kingdom.¹²⁴

In November 2018, Filippa Lentzos published a paper in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, which covers some of the same material as this study.¹²⁵ Lentzos also discusses possible reasons for the Russian government’s BW disinformation campaign. She suggested four possible motives:

- As a counter “... to scrutiny of Moscow for using and enabling the use of chemical weapons.”
- “... to discredit Western influence in former Soviet states by spreading fear and dividing public opinion.””
- As a mechanism to obtain increased Russian expenditure for biodefense. “The charges are probably aimed at a domestic audience as well, as a biological weapons threat on Russia’s doorstep could motivate military investments to counter it.”

¹²³ Personal communication, Ketii Zaridze, February 4, 2020.

¹²⁴ Steve Rosenberg, “Russian Disinformation and the Georgian ‘lab of death,’” *BBC* November 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-46157507/russian-disinformation-and-the-georgian-lab-of-death>.

¹²⁵ Filippa Lentzos, “The Russian disinformation attack that poses a biological danger,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 10, 2018, <https://thebulletin.org/2018/11/the-russian-disinformation-attack-that-poses-a-biological-danger/#>.

- “Beyond sowing distrust and political dissent, they can prime a population for physical conflict, and in the case of Georgia, Russia may even be trying to justify future military interference with its neighbor.”

Lentzos added:

Major-General Igor Kirillov claimed that the Lugar lab is part of a larger US effort to build up its military-biological potential and gain control of national collections of dangerous pathogens. Russia views this as a direct security threat. Going a step further, the chair of the Russian parliament’s committee on defense, Colonel-General Vladimir Shamanov, threatened that Russia will take diplomatic and military measures in response to the deployment of the large-scale US military-biological program in states border the Russian Federation, in particular Georgia.”

Georgian officials were not oblivious to remarks such as these. In an October 30, 2018, statement quoted by Lentzos, Elene Agladze, the deputy permanent representative of Georgia to the United Nations, said:

Our empirical experience has shown that although absurd, Russian allegations have been not just a propaganda tool, but lately even part of hybrid warfare in terms of laying a political groundwork for future aggressive actions. Therefore, statements that Russian will not tolerate bio experiments along its border should be considered a direct threat to Georgian security.

Lentzos felt that “Russia’s official national security strategy identifies the network of public health laboratories in the Caucasus and Central Asia funded by the US Defense Department as a strategic threat.” The relevant Russian national security document uses much more limited language, saying in its only reference to the subject that “The network of US military biological laboratories is expanding in the territories of states neighboring Russia.”¹²⁶ It is only statements by Zakharova, Kirillov, etc, which describe the Nunn-Lugar facilities in the CIS states as a “strategic threat.”

¹²⁶ The Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation, approved by the order of the President of Russian Federation, #683, 31 December 2015.

Finally, Lentzos quotes the official Russian government response to the report by the BWC states parties of their visit to the Lugar Center.

In Geneva, Russia circulated a reply memo on October 10 to BWC states party missions, claiming the Georgian side was attempting to create ‘a distorted image’ of the Lugar Center...’in order to conceal the true character and mission of this facility it has been formally incorporated into Georgia’s public health system.’ Georgia’s goal in inviting BWC states to visit, the Russian memo claims, is ‘to create an illusion of legitimacy and transparency,’ and Russia does ‘not see any value in participating in such a politically biased event’.¹²⁷

December 25, 2018

A last brief entry for the year of BW disinformation in the Russian media was the report that when Russian military forces occupied Ukrainian Crimea, they found shipments of various kinds, “ectoparasites, serum samples” etc. to be sent “to Europe” in one of the eleven former Soviet facilities in Ukraine that had been “modernized with Pentagon funds” in Simferopol.¹²⁸

2019

After the torrent of Russian government BW disinformation in 2018, 2019 turned out to be a happily sparse year. The first BW disinformation located was an attack by *Veterans Today* on “the American military reference laboratory for the study of dangerous pathogens in Almaty,” Kazakhstan. The accuser, Ainur Kurmanov, in a parallel to the Georgian, Giorgadze, is a prominent Kazakh opposition politician. An ex-communist, he heads the “Socialist Resistance of Kazakhstan” and as an opponent of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, he lives in Moscow presumably under Russian government protection. As in the case of Giorgadze, he should be assumed to have close connections to Russian intelligence agencies.

¹²⁷ Filippa Lentzos, “The Russian disinformation attack that poses a biological danger,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 10, 2018, <https://thebulletin.org/2018/11/the-russian-disinformation-attack-that-poses-a-biological-danger/#>.

¹²⁸ “The United States planned to create an analogue of the biological laboratory Lugar,” *RIA News*, December 25, 2018.

Kurmanov claimed that “Ukraine, Georgia and Kazakhstan [were] training ground for the use of biological weapons.” His list of specific accusations was quite long and particularly bizarre, but began with attributing

new toxic strains of contagious measles disease...first found in Ukraine...specifically designed for conducting so-called test tests for possible further spread of more dangerous diseases...using the example of this contagious disease, modified in US military laboratories, the mechanisms for the spread of more dangerous diseases in the territories of the former republics of the Soviet Union – Ukraine, Georgia and Kazakhstan – are now being worked out across the ocean.... At the same time, it is also a check of the health care system and epidemiological services in Russia, since it was supposed to spread measles from the territory of Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Georgia, as from bridgeheads...this indirectly proves the US involvement in the spread of this massive measles epidemic. It can be concluded that, in practice, these are not all “Ukrainian” strains, but the most American ones and planted from the reference laboratories of dangerous pathogens in three republics at once.¹²⁹

January 9, 2019

Another Georgian opposition politician posted claims that the Lugar Center was responsible for an outbreak of “swine flu” H1N1, in Georgia, claiming that the virus had been spread by the facility. In reality, the H1N1 outbreak began in 2009, two years before the Lugar Center opened in 2011, and had spread to five continents, not just within Georgia. The posts urged Georgians to mount protest rallies urging the closure of the facility. The posts were then repeated by two Georgian opposition media outlets, *Alia* and *Euronews.ge*. In reporting this, the Georgian government’s *Myth Detector Bulletin* mentioned several of the earlier Russian government’s BW disinformation charges: in March 2018, the spokesperson for Onishchenko’s agency accused the

¹²⁹ VT Editors, “Epidemic in Kazakhstan: US Blamed for Germ Warfare,” *Veterans Today and News Front*, February 10, 2019.

Lugar Center of spreading the brown marmorated stink bug in Abkhazia, and in 2016, Onishchenko himself accused the facility of producing the Zika virus in Abkhazia.¹³⁰

April 2019

A public opinion survey in Georgia in April 2019 demonstrated the degree to which Russian disinformation had penetrated among the Georgian population. When presented with the following statement among one of four unrelated topics, “*US sponsored Lugar lab in Georgia contributed to the spread of epidemics,*” 38 percent replied False, 21 percent replied True, and 40 percent replied Don’t Know. The responses to the same question were also disaggregated by demographic groups: in the capital, in large urban areas, in small urban areas, in rural areas, in Armenian settlements and in Azeri settlements. The results were approximately the same throughout, with the exception of the Azeri settlements where the Don’t Know percentage reached 71 percent.¹³¹

July 12, 2019

Critical information about the visits by Russian scientists to the Lugar Center was obtained in July 2019. “There were about 18 visitors from Russia in the Lugar Center since 2016. Among them 2 persons were working in the laboratory (WHO training), 3 persons were visiting for laboratory equipment installation, and others were for introductory visit[s]. At least half of them [were Russian] government scientist[s].”¹³² That would mean that there were nine or more Russian *government* scientists among the visiting Russian scientists.

October 11, 2019

Another of the more sophisticated disinformation articles, in the form of an historical survey, appeared in two Russian proxy publications, *China Focus* on October 10, 2019, and *Foreign Policy Journal* (a name presumably intended to mimic the US journal *Foreign Policy*), on October 12, 2019. Beginning with the novel charge that the United States had carried out “live

¹³⁰ “H1N1 Flu Emerged Two Years Before Opening Lugar Lab,” *Myth Detector*, January 9, 2019.

¹³¹ “Public Attitudes in Georgia, Results of April 2019 Survey,” Carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia.

¹³² Dr. Paata Imnadze, personal communication, July 12, 2019.

agent tests at Busan’s Port Pier 8” in South Korea, it repeated the old charges of US BW use against North Korea and China during the Korean War, and then against Cuba. It then moved to outbreaks of African Swine Fever in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia in 2007, reaching China in 2018. Finally it turned to outbreaks of tropical diseases, allegedly non-endemic, wherever the US funded laboratories under the Cooperative Biological Engagement Program, and “the role of potential covert goals in viral outbreaks.”¹³³ In August 2019, the same author, now identified as “Dr. Dan Steinbock,” published a more technical survey of African Swine Fever on another Russian disinformation platform, *Eurasia Review*. Both articles were written in an unusual style for BW disinformation published on Russian government proxy platforms. The accusations were frequently more carefully worded to be indirect and used innuendo, rather than blatant falsification.¹³⁴

November 11, 2019

TASS, the Russian news agency, carried a new statement by Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia’s Security Council and a former head of the FSB, essentially repeating his remarks of October 2015. He stated that “The United States is creating a network of laboratories around the world where biological weapons can be manufactured. ...Of particular concern is the Pentagon’s activity to create biological laboratories all over the world, primarily in the CIS member-countries, which conduct research on infectious diseases and where biological weapons can be made.”¹³⁵

2020

January 19, 2020

¹³³ Dan Steinbock, “The Concern for the Secretive Bio-Geopolitics,” *ForeignPolicyJournal.com*, October 11, 2019.

¹³⁴ Dan Steinbock, “The Mystery of the African Swine Fever in China and Asia – OpEd,” *EurAsia Review*, August 27, 2019. The article carried a very impressive list of Steinbock’s alleged international academic affiliations and consultancies, few of which are verifiable.

¹³⁵ “US Creating network of labs where bio weapons can be made, says Russian security chief,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, TASS, November 11, 2019.

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov combined remarks criticizing the OPCW with very ambiguous references to the US and a BW verification protocol, and the US-supported Nunn-Lugar facilities.

“Washington has displayed its unwillingness to speak openly about biological warfare issues with other nations, and seeks to impose its desired decisions through under-the-radar negotiations that lack transparency,” Acting Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said during his Friday [17 January 2020] press conference on the results of Russian diplomacy in 2019. “The Americans basically unilaterally block this solution and seek to promote their own interests through secretariats of various organizations, including the UN Secretariat, through their non-transparent, murky, back-door bilateral contacts that push their agendas,” he said, pointing to the fact that the US “sets up biological laboratories on post-Soviet territories.”

“These are all very serious issues and, once again, they worry everyone,” Lavrov emphasized. “But, once again, the Americans do not want to discuss them fairly, involving all parties to the biological weapons ban.”¹³⁶

March 24, 2020

Russian government agencies were also able to obtain the assistance of an Armenian proxy, an alleged “Armenian virologist” and “international expert on the control of zoonotic diseases and the organization of veterinary health,” Grigory Grigoryan. He was reportedly a former head of “the State Food Safety Service Armenia” which means that he would have been acquainted with Onishchenko before Grigoryan lost his position after a change in government.

Grigoryan posted two items in 2020. One post appeared on the platform for EADaily and the other on Stoletie.ru, which poses as a highly intellectual forum. In these posts, Grigoryan combined attacks on Fort Detrick, the Nunn-Lugar facilities in all CIS states, the Biological Weapon Convention, with accusations of widespread US use of BW for the entire post-WW2 period. In typical Onishchenko fashion, stated that the various outbreaks of common, endemic

¹³⁶ Russian Foreign Ministry Statement on US Unwillingness to Deal Openly about BW Issues, January 17,2020.

diseases in Armenia were “nothing more than a field test of biological weapons.” Grigoryan proclaimed that

The Third World War has already begun, and its weapons are biological. The 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is long out of force and has lost its meaning as some countries that have refused to ratify it [sic] have both acted and continue to circumvent its provisions by relying on their economic and military muscles.

Available evidence suggests that after the Second World War, the use of biological weapons by individual countries for geopolitical purposes did not stop, but was either not noticed, or hushed up due to the lack of proper investigation, and consequently, evidence. In the 21st century, the same scenario was observed during the spread of H5N1, N1N1, African swine fever, severe acute respiratory syndrome, Middle East respiratory syndrome and Ebola, which appear to have been a kind of “prelude” to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. ...

All attempts to develop and implement international mechanisms to control, prevent and prevent the development and accumulation of biological weapons by individual countries have failed. Therefore, there is nothing left but an adequate response to force these countries to cease actions that pose an uncontrollable risk to the existence of humanity...¹³⁷

After this, one might have assumed that 2020 would see a continued tapering off of Russian BW disinformation, but the unanticipated outbreak of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in Wuhan, China, around January 1, 2020, was too much for the disinformation sections of the Russian intelligence agencies to resist. The disinformation spigot was not turned on until several days after Chinese President Xi Jinping’s official statement on January 20, 2020, which finally publicly acknowledged the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan and its spread to other cities in China. The very first reference to SARS-CoV-2 being a US-made biological weapon appeared

¹³⁷ Anna Beglaryan, “World War III has already begun, and its weapons are biological: an interview,” EADaily, March 24, 2020, <https://eadaily.com/en/news/2020/03/24/world-war-iii-has-already-begun-and-its-weapon-is-biological-interview>. See also, Grigor Grigoryan, “These were field tests of biological weapons,” Stoletie.ru, December 16, 2020, <http://www.stoletie.ru/>.

on January 20, 2020 on *tvzvezda.ru*, a Russian government-owned platform operated by the Russian Ministry of Defense.¹³⁸ The article quoted a so-called “expert,” Igor Nikulin, about whom much more will follow, suggesting that the unknown pneumonia in China “might be a type of biological weapon.”¹³⁹ This was followed on January 22 by a report that the coronavirus was “likely elaborated in Nato biolabs.”¹⁴⁰

Then, between January 24 and January 27, at least eight Russian publications or platforms carried particularly inane coronavirus disinformation stories, since they would obviously be seen to be ridiculous within days. These were:

- *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Russia’s largest circulation tabloid newspaper
- Gazeta.ru
- REN.TV
- *Moskovsky Komsomolets*
- RIA Novosti
- Moscow radio
- the *National News Service Agency* (translated from the Russian)
- the SVR-sponsored Strategic Culture Foundation.¹⁴¹

These were at first not the most prominent Russian media platforms, and of them, some are overtly government-controlled, two are not (*Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets*), and two are covert operations. Three of the media outlets featured the comments of Igor Nikulin, an alleged “Russian biochemistry and military expert,” or a “biological weapons expert.” He was variously also described as a “former advisor to the United Nations Commission on Biological and Chemical Weapons” – in some cases the words were capitalized, in others not – or as a “Former member of the UN Biological Weapon Commission.” However, there has

¹³⁸ Semantic Visions, “Russia Leading From Behind: Coronavirus-focused Case Study of Cross-Border Disinformation Spread,” March 27, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/a-new-chinese-coronavirus-was-likely-elaborated-in-nato-biolabs/>.

¹³⁹ DFRLab, *Weaponized: How Rumors about Covid-19’s Origins led to a Narrative Arms Race*, Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council, February 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/weaponized-covid19-narratives/>.

¹⁴⁰ “DISINFO: A New Chinese Coronasvirus was Likely Elaborated in NATO Biolabs,” *EUvsDISINFO*, May 14, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/a-new-chinese-coronavirus-was-likely-elaborated-in-nato-biolabs/>.

¹⁴¹ “Russian Media Spew US Coronavirus Conspiracies for Domestic Audience,” *Polygraph.info*, January 28, 2020.

never been any such United Nations “Commission,” and no United Nations agency has been able to identify any association with him. In 2017, Nikulin had been a Russian source of disinformation on the Syrian use of chemical weapons, and in 2018 he had appeared on Russian media claiming that the United States was responsible for the Novichok poisoning of the Skripals in the United Kingdom. Both in 2017 and 2018, Bellingcat reported that all relevant UN agencies denied that Nikulin had ever advised them about anything. Nevertheless, in January 2020, and continuing into April 2020, the Russian disinformation releases continued to use the same false descriptions for him. Between 2000 and 2005 Nikulin had worked in the division that prepared bacterial culture media at the former Soviet BW institute located in Obolensk. Databases of Russian scientific publications, *ELibrary.ru* and Scopus, do not show a single publication by him.

Now Nikulin offered a half dozen different false narratives regarding the outbreak of the coronavirus:

- In *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, that “American bioterrorism” was responsible for spreading the virus.¹⁴² *Moskovsky Komsomolets* added: “The Chinese believe the coronavirus is created by the Americans...The spread of the virus ‘successfully’ began on the eve of the Eastern New Year...Moreover, all diseased are Asians. There are no Europeans, although there are many tourists in Wuhan during the winter holidays. How can one not believe the horror story that the virus was created in American laboratories and is specially tailored for people with Chinese genes. From the point of view of science, this is quite possible.”
- In *RIA Novosti*, “China is surrounded by American military labs, and there is a US consulate in Wuhan, the staff of which could have delivered the dangerous cargo to the PRC.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² “American ‘accent’ of the Chinese virus. The expert saw signs of American bioterrorism in the spread of coronaviruses. Under suspicion of 400 laboratories.” *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, January 27, 2020.

¹⁴³ “Russian Media Spew US Coronavirus Conspiracies for Domestic Audience,” *Polygraph.info*, January 28, 2020.

Nikulin had other ingenious suggestions, and then made a leap to the Lugar Center and Giorgadze's documents, plus that discovery of no less than 400 US "military biological labs around the world."

"It can be beneficial for American corporations that are developing these kinds of new diseases just for profit. Or maybe for the Americans themselves, because America is the only country that has 400 military biological laboratories around the world, not only around Russia, but also around China, in Malaysia, in Indonesia, in the Philippines – the US military is everywhere working," the military expert explains. "We already talked about one of them, the Lugar center in Tbilisi. Documents confirming the dangerous tests, then published by the former Minister of State Security of Georgia... *From the papers it followed that in the Lugar Center they created, for example, a drone carrying mosquitoes infected with malaria.*"¹⁴⁴

Nikulin continued his tales from one publication to another.

"-Is it possible that a new coronavirus only affects people of Chinese nationality? That is, asked for certain features of the human gene?"

- If it turns out that this is indeed so, then such a natural mutation cannot be for sure. This is mathematical proof that it is an artificially created virus.

-In which laboratories can [it] appear?"

"Of course I can only speculate. But look, China, like Russia, is surrounded by American research bio-laboratories They are in different countries along the perimeter of the borders of China – in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea and Japan. They were in Indonesia, but closed there.

And wherever these American bio-laboratories are, or nearby, there are outbreaks of new diseases, often unknown. Americans simply ignore threats to the local population. The main thing is to be away from the US.

-How many of these foreign biolaboratory [has] the United States?"

¹⁴⁴ Maria Berk, "The Chinese are sure that the deadly coronavirus created by the Americans," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, January 24, 2020.

-Already 400.

-*They are overseen by the Pentagon?*

-Of course. This is all funded by the Pentagon. Therefore, it is not necessary to say that peaceful humanitarian research is being conducted there. Do you think Pentagon money is spent on peaceful research?"¹⁴⁵

It was not until March 18, 2020, that a competent Russian virologist and academician was interviewed on a Russian TV channel and rebutted at least those of Nikulin's claims that could be rebutted on scientific grounds.¹⁴⁶ Several small Russian non-government newspapers also avoided publishing any disinformation. None other than the Russian Minister of Health, Mikhail Murashko, interviewed on state-controlled *Pervy Kanal* [Channel One]) said that "After all, the majority are saying now that this is a natural virus, which has adapted to coexistence with humans. I see no reason to doubt that."¹⁴⁷ It is clear that other branches of the Russian government behaved quite differently from the intelligence services that were producing hundreds of coronavirus disinformation postings at the same time.

The fringe nationalistic and right-wing Russian politician, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, announced his support for similar theories:

"LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky said Americans could be causing coronavirus outbreaks in China. The politician expressed two theories, in each of which his suspicions fall on the United States, the Moscow Talks radio station reports.

Zhirinovsky suggested that the virus could appear in China because of the desire of American pharmaceutical companies to cash in.

'Pharmacists will become billionaires in 2020, and everyone will quickly forget everything,' he added.

¹⁴⁵ "American 'accent' of the Chinese virus. The expert saw signs of American bioterrorism in the spread of coronaviruses. Under suspicion of 400 laboratories." *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, January 27, 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Dmitry Shchugorev, Interview with Dr. Sergey Netesov, VESTI.RU, TV 24, March 18, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ "Murashko has no doubts about the natural origin of coronavirus," *Kommersant*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4315608>.

According to his second version, coronavirus attacked people after the American side used biological weapons. The [Russian Duma] deputy believes that the virus could be transmitted by air. The main objective of the United States in these cases would be the desire to hit the Chinese economy and undermine economic power.”¹⁴⁸

The Strategic Culture Foundation disinformation site and several others introduced the allegation that the Gates Foundation was responsible for the origin of the coronavirus, a charge that would flourish for months.¹⁴⁹ They did this by referring to a patent obtained in 2015 by the Pirbright Foundation located in the United Kingdom, an organization that was supported in part by the Gates Foundation. The Pirbright patent, however, was for a coronavirus variant called the Infectious Bronchitis Virus that attacks poultry. The pathogen had been attenuated in order to produce a vaccine for poultry, but the Russian disinformation sites alleged that this was the Covid-19 pathogen. There is a possibility that Russian intelligence agencies adopted the Gates-Pirbright allegation from a Q-Anon related posting on January 21, 2020, a US ultra-rightwing platform.¹⁵⁰ However, Gates had already been a target of Russian BW disinformation years before 2020 as the entries in this chronology for August 15, 2014, and February 15, 2016, demonstrate.

Another of the earliest false Russian coronavirus postings was produced by *TV Zvezda*, the information portal, TV channel, and website produced by the Russian MOD. The story was titled “Coronavirus: US Biological Warfare against Russia and China,” and it employed a classic of Marxist dialectic, asking “who benefits from another SARS unsettling a competitor?” It answered the question, “the answer is obvious; the coronavirus epidemic 2019-nCoV, which hit China is highly likely on the hand of the United States.”¹⁵¹ The article then went on to

¹⁴⁸ “Zhirinovskiy calls the outbreak of coronavirus biological attack by the United States,” *Gazeta.ru*, January 27, 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Leonid Savin, “Confirmed Cases of coronavirus in China,” *Strategic Culture Foundation*, January 27, 2020. See also, “Mutation, clandestine laboratory or provocation: where did the coronavirus come from,” *RENTV*, January 26, 2020; “US may be responsible for Chinese coronavirus epidemic,” *National News Service*, January 27, 2020; “Biohazard waste boxes found buried inside evacuated US Consulate in Wuhan,” blog post of “China Rising Radio Sinoland.”

¹⁵⁰ Daisuke Wakabayashi et al., “Fake Theories Put the Blame on Bill Gates,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2020.

¹⁵¹ Julia Papsheva, “Coronavirus: US biological warfare against Russia and China,” January 29, 2020.

reintroduce many of the routine charges against the Lugar Center and its sister facilities in CIS states.

In a few more days, a half dozen sites devoted to exposing disinformation disclosed an expanding list of Russian disinformation publications carrying coronavirus disinformation stories. The Atlantic Councils DFRLab posted links to no fewer than thirteen different Russian sites, and some of these now included the first-rank of Russian media platforms—*Pravda*, *Izvestia* and Channel One TV—as well as additional small and relatively obscure sites, and Russian social media platforms, VK (VKontakte), YouTube, and Topcor.ru.¹⁵² Topcor.ru pushed the “economic” conspiracy theory that the coronavirus was “America’s revenge on China for the ongoing trade war that’s cost the US billions of dollars The US will benefit immensely from the damage the coronavirus will inflict on China’s already weak economy.”¹⁵³ Multiple small Russian YouTube channels shared videos which linked the coronavirus outbreak to the CIA and US bioweapons research.

A disinformation survey produced by the *BBC* noted one of the most bizarre instances, and it appeared on the state-controlled Channel One during its main primetime evening news program, *Vremya*. On February 4, *Vremya* initiated a special feature titled “Coronavirus: A Conspirology.” It was ostensibly reporting on the various conspiracy theories, while it embellished on and aided their further distribution on Russia’s most prominent TV channel. The first broadcast featured several different examples:

- Major Western pharmaceutical companies were exaggerating the danger of the disease in order to reap profits. The *Vremya* program anchor, Kirill Kleymyonov, commented that these corporations “were playing on the ‘fears and misfortunes of half of humanity’ in order to enrich themselves.”

¹⁵² “Bioweapons, secret labs, and the CIA: Pro-Kremlin actors blame the US for coronavirus outbreak” *DFRLab*, January 30, 2020. See also, Eto Buziashvili, “Bioweapons, secret labs, and the CIA: pro-Kremlin actors blame the US for coronavirus outbreak,” *DFRLab*, January 30, 2020.

¹⁵³ Arthur Villasanto, “Coronavirus Update: Russia Blames USA for NCov2019 Outbreak,” *International Business Times*, February 5, 2020; “Conspiratorial Virus,” *EU vs Disinformation, Disinfo Reviews*, Issue #181, January 30, 2020; “Trends of the Week,” *EU vs Disinformation, Disinfo Reviews*, February 6, 2020; “Russian media amplify coronavirus conspiracy theories,” *BBC MONITORING*, February 6, 2020; James Laporta et al., “Exclusive: Documents Reveal US Military is Tracking Russian Government News Agencies for Disinformation on Coronavirus,” *Newsweek*, February 6, 2020.

- Channel One’s New York correspondent reported that “the US Department of Justice has long been patenting coronaviruses, which are bred specifically for medical and scientific purposes. ... The new disease is proving so profitable for Wall Street that ‘even if there was no corona virus it would have been worth inventing it’.”
- It claimed that a global response to a fictional coronavirus “was planned out during a global simulation exercise Event 201 in the USA in October 2019.”

Vremya “...also rebroadcast a video of Gates speaking in 2011, which is often used by conspiracy theorists to claim that he wants to reduce population growth—or even world population itself—by killing off people with vaccines.” But in his speech, Gates had actually been advocating for the use of vaccines against childhood diseases, which would allow children to live longer and depress the birth rate. The next day, the *Vremya TV* host stated with a straight face that the words “corona” and “crown” in both Latin and Russian indicated that Trump, the sponsor of beauty pageants, was responsible for the virus outbreak. “Thus, the origin of the virus, and most importantly, the aims and goals of its use, become crystal clear.” *Vremya* correspondents were then asked to comment, and in their responses repeated “old Russian state media fake claims that the US has been developing biological weapons at the laboratory in Georgia, as well as conspiracy theories that the coronavirus may be an ‘ethnic’ weapon developed by the US to attack a key economic and geopolitical rival, China.”¹⁵⁴

At the height of the Russian government’s coronavirus disinformation campaign, it introduced legislation providing for prison sentences as long as five years and \$25,000 in fines for “spreading misinformation relating to the coronavirus.” President Putin had called for the legislation to penalize “provocations, stupid gossip and malicious lies.”¹⁵⁵ Putin was referring to suggestions in Russian social media that the Russian government was drastically under-reporting coronavirus cases and mortality, or reporting cases in localities or hospitals where government authorities had not reported any cases. These reports were, however, quite accurate and were not misinformation. Any discussion of doctors who allegedly “fell” from balconies after protesting

¹⁵⁴ “Russian media amplify coronavirus conspiracy theories,” *BBC MONITORING*, February 6, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ Zack Budryk “Russian lawmakers approve fines, prison terms for spreading false coronavirus information,” *The Hill*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/russian-lawmakers-approve-fines-prison-terms-for-spreading-false-coronavirus-information/ar-BB1215Ae>.

the absence of necessary protective equipment in their hospitals was also punished. The government's own disinformation of course continued unperturbed by the legislation.

Synopses of many dozens of the early Russian coronavirus disinformation stories that subsequently appeared have been omitted. However, that was remedied by three additional *EUvsDisinfo* releases. On March 15, 2020, the *EUvsDisinfo* site published a list of 120 Russia “coronavirus” disinformation stories dating between January 22, 2020, and March 16, 2020.¹⁵⁶ About a dozen of these did not in fact concern the coronavirus outbreak, but about 100 did. Of these, the titles of over thirty directly or indirectly claimed that the coronavirus was a biological weapon, created in a laboratory, by the United States, by “NATO Biolabs,” by the United Kingdom or by Latvia, and so on. The rest impute an enormous range of explanations of its origins and purposes, from having been decided on at a Davos forum “by the Rothschilds and the Gates” (March 13) to being aimed at depopulating the planet, or making the global population infertile, or as a US tool to establish a totalitarian world order. One claimed that the “coronavirus is a tool to introduce tyranny;” another that it was “the Chernobyl of the EU;” a third that it would cause NATO’s dissolution, that the healthcare system of Ukraine was collapsing, and that “the Baltic states are doomed.” On the very same days, others claimed that the coronavirus was “not dangerous at all” and could be “cured with saline in four days.”¹⁵⁷ One extremely imaginative and creative disinformation story alleged that the opposition in Belarus, together with the Belarusian orthodox church, hoped that millions of Belarusians would fall ill with coronavirus in order to help them topple the sitting government.¹⁵⁸ By March 25, 2020, the following week’s *EUvsDisinfo* listed 162 Russian coronavirus disinformation stories, and by April 30, 2020, the number had reached 400. The numbers continued to rise. Some of these disinformation stories even claimed that the coronavirus was “not real.” At the same time, in

¹⁵⁶ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/?text=coronavirus&date=>. In all, the *EUvsDisinfo* site catalogued some 7,997 cases of pro-Kremlin disinformation on all subjects between January 6, 2015 and March 20, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/>.

¹⁵⁷ *EUvsDisinfo*, *Disinformation Review*, March 26, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinfo-review/>; *EUvsDisinfo*, “EEAS Special Report: Disinformation on the Coronavirus – Short Assessment of the Information Environment,” March 19, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-disinformation-on-the-coronavirus-short-assessment-of-the-information-environment/>.

¹⁵⁸ *EUvsDisinfo*, “Disinfo: The Belarusian Opposition Plans to Infect Millions with coronavirus to Disrupt Presidential Elections,” February 18, 2020.

mid-March 2020, the Russian government asked the US and EU countries for sanction waivers because of the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁵⁹

As the outbreak began to affect the Russian population more seriously, the level of disinformation increased, and its anti-US element in particular. The volume of Russian government Covid-19 disinformation releases since January 2020 is astounding: *EUvsDisinfo* recorded 700 cases by February 5, 2021¹⁶⁰ and 860 instances by July 22, 2021.¹⁶¹ As early as March 2020, a US Department of State report had recorded 2 million tweets in multiple languages, and Russian use of bots and thousands of Russia government-linked social media accounts to Covid disinformation. Nevertheless, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zakharova responded to the US Department of State comments that the Russian government was responsible by saying that “It is a deliberate fake.”

It would be useful however to look at one of the early 120 in particular. It was a February 13, 2020, posting on *Sputnik*’s Spanish-language outlet titled “Scientists: Coronavirus would be a weapon of biological warfare.” It was a much longer posting than most of the others, and ranged very widely in subject matter:

- repeating the charges that the US had used “biological weapons during the war in Korea and Vietnam,” and “the history of the use of viruses by the United States as biological weapons,”
- claiming that “Already in 1987, about 107 [US] virologists were dedicating themselves to this task...to elevate viruses to the level of biological weapons,”
- stating that DARPA was “responsible for the research, development and testing of new weapons, including biological ones,”

¹⁵⁹ Mason Clark et al., “Russia in Review: Kremlin Attempts to Exploit Covid-19 Crisis to Remove Sanctions on Russia and its Partners,” Institute for the Study of War, April 3, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russia-review-kremlin-attempts-exploit-covid-19-crisis-remove-sanctions-russia-and-its>.

¹⁶⁰ EUvsDisinfo, *Disinformation Review*, February 5, 2021, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/deflection-instead-of-dialogue/>.

¹⁶¹ EUvsDisinfo, Disinfo Database, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/?disinfo_keywords%5B%5D=keyword_106935&date=&per_page=.

- claiming that “the Pentagon is developing deadly viruses in 25 countries” (taken from Gaytandzhieva) and that “Currently the [US] Department of Defense has more than 400 biosafety level BSL-3 and four laboratories abroad.”¹⁶²

The actual number of US DOD BSL-3 facilities is apparently four.

Woven among the preceding was “information” about the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan. In all there were twenty-two lies in the piece, a spectacular performance.

The following *EUvsDisinfo* available on April 2, 2020, provided a superb summary. It had aggregated 215 examples of Russian coronavirus disinformation between January 22 and March 25, 2020.

- 39 items stated that “the US had created the coronavirus;”
- 26 items stated that “the EU is failing to cope with the crisis and is disintegrating as a result;”
- 24 items stated that the virus “is being used as a weapon against China and its economy;”
- 14 items stated that the “coronavirus crisis is a secret plan of the global elite”

Using 152 examples and 263,902 viewer responses, it then sought to determine which of the four most common themes gained the greatest viewer engagement. The articles that garnered the greatest viewer response were those that claimed that the coronavirus was manufactured by the US. Seven of the top ten viewed items in Russian, Arabic, Spanish, and English charged the US with having produced the virus.¹⁶³

Attacks on the Lugar Center in Georgia continued, as did accusations that the Covid-19 virus had been made in Ukraine and of course that it had been made in NATO labs. A novel suggestion was offered by the Speaker of the Russian State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, a Putin ally. Speaking to the Duma on April 27, 2021, he suggested that the virus did leak accidentally from a

¹⁶² Vicky Pelaez, “Scientists: Corona Virus would be a weapon of biological warfare,” *Sputnik News*, February 13, 2020.

¹⁶³ “Throwing Coronavirus Disinfo at the Wall to See What Sticks,” *EUvsDisinfo*, *Disinformation Review*, April 2, 2020.

laboratory in Wuhan, China, but that it was “an American laboratory”: “Clear it was found in Wuhan. But again, whose lab is it in Wuhan? An American lab. They funded it.”¹⁶⁴

During the same time period, various Chinese, Iranian, and Indian government officials repeated many of the Russian coronavirus disinformation stories. It is interesting to note that between February 4 and March 6, at least five particularly virulent disinformation stories were carried by the Iranian *PressTV* which operates from Germany using a domain name registered in the United Kingdom, often using themes from Russian coronavirus disinformation posts. Three of these appeared on March 5, 2020, one of which managed to locate a retired American professor of philosophy at the University of Minnesota who

suggested that “Zionist elements” in the US or Israel have exploited the global coronavirus epidemic to create and spread a deadlier strain of the virus in Iran as a form of “biological warfare” against Iranians. “I believe that what is going on is, under the cloak of the alleged coronavirus epidemic, that biological warfare is being conducted against Iran by Zionist elements who are taking advantage of the situation,” said James Fetzer, a retired professor of philosophy at the University of Minnesota.¹⁶⁵

The same Iranian outlet similarly located

A former military intelligence officer of the CIA [who] has said that the “Coronavirus did not occur naturally through mutation but rather was produced in a laboratory, possibly as a biological warfare agent.... If one even considers it possible that the United States had a hand in creating the coronavirus at what remains of its once extensive biological weapons research center in Ft Detrick, Maryland, it is very likely that Israel was a partner in the project. Helping to develop the virus would also explain why Israeli scientists have been able to claim success at creating a vaccine so quickly, possibly because the virus and a treatment for it were developed simultaneously,” he noted.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Jonny Tickle, “Leaked from US lab? Head of Russia’s parliament & key Putin ally Volodin claims to have new ‘explanation’ for origin of Covid-19,” RT, April 27, 2021.

¹⁶⁵ “Zionist elements developed deadlier strain of coronavirus against Iran: Academic,” PRESSTV, March 5, 2020.

¹⁶⁶ “Corona was produced in a laboratory: Former CIA intel officer,” PRESSTV, March 6, 2020.

The retired CIA officer, Philip Giraldi, had posted his own article a day earlier, written for the SVR-directed Strategic Culture Foundation. Giraldi wrote: “It might be possible that Washington has created and unleashed the virus in a bid to bring Beijing’s growing economy and military might down a few notches.”¹⁶⁷ It was a theme that had already appeared in dozens of the Russian coronavirus disinformation releases since the end of January 2020 without the caveat of “might be possible.” Despite writing for the Strategic Culture Foundation, Giraldi serves as the executive director of the Council for the National Interest, a non-profit organization in the United States.

Gaytandzhieva’s disinformation in 2018 included that “[US] biowarfare scientists under diplomatic cover purportedly test man-made viruses at Pentagon biolabs in at least 25 countries across the globe.”¹⁶⁸ The global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic afforded Gaytandzhieva the opportunity to produce another more serious composition that was overwhelmingly composed of open-source material obtained from US and Georgian sources. Its objective was to describe ISTC-supported research at the Lugar Center in Georgia that concerned sampling of regionally available bat coronaviruses. The four opening paragraphs comprising the first page of the composition contained no fewer than seven false statements. However, the most significant charge brought by Gaytandzhieva was in a section titled “Former Bioweapon Scientists working at the Lugar Center. ... Seven of the Georgian scientists involved in the ISTC bat research project in Georgia turn out to be former scientists who had previously worked on the development of biological weapons according to the ISTC project documents.”¹⁶⁹ If the statement is accurate, it would of course mean that they did such work for the Soviet biological weapons program prior to 1992, when Georgia was still part of the USSR and when various Georgian research institutes which were antecedents to the Lugar Center were integrated into the Soviet biological weapons development program. However, Gaytandzhieva of course does not explain this.

¹⁶⁷ Philip Giraldi, “Who Made Coronavirus? Was it the US, Israel or China?” Global Research/Strategic Culture Foundation, March 5, 2020.

¹⁶⁸ “US making biological weapons around the world: Report,” PRESSTV, February 22, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, “Project G-2101: Pentagon biolab discovered MERS and SARS-like coronaviruses in bats,” *Arms Watch*, April 30, 2020, <http://armswatch.com/project-g-2101-pentagon-biolab-discovered-mers-and-sars-like-coronaviruses-in-bats/>.

On September 3, 2020, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that “special services from abroad,” which everyone understood to mean Russian intelligence agencies, had hacked the database of the Georgian Ministry of Health for the third time in several years in order to obtain documents pertaining to the Lugar Center.¹⁷⁰ The Russian intelligence posted the materials on Twitter and on a forum for trading database hacks, *RaidForums*, based in the US. Three days later Russian intelligence turned the hacked documents over to Gaytandzhieva who published them on her *Arms Watch* site as coming from “the Pentagon biolaboratory in Georgia.”¹⁷¹ The Georgian Ministry announcement, however, stated that forgeries had been introduced into the items released by the Russian intelligence agency. The forgeries consisted of alterations to the titles and budgets of projects being carried out at the Lugar Center, and details in the tables that appeared in some of the Lugar Center documents.¹⁷² It was of course impossible for any viewer of the materials to know which items were accurate and which were forged.

Some Russian coronavirus disinformation postings had claimed that the virus had been genetically engineered to target “Russian DNA,” and some Chinese disinformation had made the same claim in regard to “Chinese DNA.” The same theme was picked up in Iran. A professor at the Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences, run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), described the coronavirus on Iranian television as a “‘biological ethnic weapon’ specifically created by the ‘Americans and Zionist regime’ to target Iranian DNAs.”¹⁷³ The exact same charge had been made during the preceding two months in Iranian TV broadcasts, which also claimed that the coronavirus was a “Zionist biological terrorist attack.” In the past, Iranian authorities had apparently claimed that Israel had conducted “12 bioterrorist attacks against the people of Iran.” On March 10, 2020, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former president of Iran, wrote to the director of WHO that it was necessary to identify “the main responsibility of production

¹⁷⁰ Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, “Statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia,” September 3, 2020. See also, “‘Foreign special service’ hacks Lugar Lab and Georgian Health Ministry,” *OC Media*, September 3, 2020.

¹⁷¹ Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, “New data leak from the Pentagon biolaboratory in Georgia,” *Arms Watch*, September 6, 2020. She also published a related item dealing with one of the Nunn-Lugar financed facilities in Kazakhstan. Dilyana Gaytandzhieva, “Pentagon Unit A1266 studies bioterrorism agents in Kazakhstan,” *Arms Watch*, July 21, 2020.

¹⁷² Personal communications, Georgian government officials, September 8 and 9, 2020.

¹⁷³ Kasra Arabi, “Iran Knows Who to Blame for the Virus,” *Foreign Policy* List.Serv, March 19, 2020.

and distribution of the virus, by the laboratories that produced it, and those perpetrating a biological war on nations.” Ahmadinejad was almost certainly referring to the United States, and he repeated the same message on a social media posting:

The WHO must immediately identify the lab that produced and spread the virus, as well as the other centers that supported the biological war against humanity.

It is clear to the world that the mutated coronavirus was produced in a lab, manufactured by the warfare stock houses of biological war belonging to world powers, & that it constitutes a threat on humanity more destructive than the other weapons that target humanity.¹⁷⁴

The commander of the IRGC stated that the coronavirus might be an “American biological invasion,” and the Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, referred to it as “an enemy plot.”¹⁷⁵ The secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council referred to the “role [of the United States] in creating and spreading the coronavirus.”¹⁷⁶ Finally, Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, also claimed that the coronavirus was “created by America.”¹⁷⁷

Before any of the senior Iranian government officials had made coronavirus charges against the United States, various commentators in the Arab world, in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, had made coronavirus disinformation charges between January 27 and February 5, 2020. These all adapted the earliest Russian COVID disinformation releases and essentially argued that the coronavirus was a US biological warfare attack on China, primarily for economic reasons, but added unique features of their own:

- The earliest was apparently an Egyptian journalist on January 27, 2020, arguing that “The US Spread the Virus to Harm China’s Economy and Reputation”: “American factories are the first to manufacture every kind of virus and bacteria, from the virulent smallpox virus

¹⁷⁴ Letter by Mahmoud Admadinejad to His Excellency, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, March 10, 2020.

¹⁷⁵ Kasra Arabi, “Iran Knows Who to Blame for the Virus,” *Foreign Policy List.Serv*, March 19, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ “Iran Backs China, Calls to Investigate US ‘Creation and Spread’ of Coronavirus,” *Newseek*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/iran-back-china-calls-us-coronavirus-1493041>.

¹⁷⁷ Farnaz Fassihi, “Iran, A Hot Spot, Insists Trade Sanctions from US are Taking Lives,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2020.

and the bubonic plague virus to all the viruses we saw in the recent years, such as mad cow disease and swine flu.”¹⁷⁸

- On February 2, a Saudi author wrote that the COVID virus “is genetically engineered,” and that the US had introduced the “coronavirus cousin, SARS,” into China in 2003.¹⁷⁹
- On February 3, a Syrian journalist wrote that the coronavirus outbreak in China “was part of a commercial-biological-psychological war waged by the US against China.... ‘From Ebola, Zika, SARS, avian flu and swine flu, through anthrax and mad cow disease to the corona[virus] – [all these] deadly viruses were manufactured by the US and threaten to annihilate the peoples of the world. [The US] has turned biological warfare into a new type of war’.” He quoted a notorious Finnish doctor and conspiracy theorist, converting him into “The Finnish Minister of Health and Social Affairs,” saying that “the US was acting to reduce the population of the world by two-thirds.”¹⁸⁰
- Another came from a Palestinian professor of sociology, Seif Da’na, teaching at a University of Wisconsin affiliate campus and speaking on *Manar TV*, a Hezbollah station in Lebanon, on March 29, 2020. He suggested that the coronavirus may have leaked from Fort Detrick: “Perhaps this leaking was not deliberate. We are not talking here about a conspiracy.”¹⁸¹ Da’na left unexplained how the perhaps-leaked virus made its way to Wuhan and China.
- A representative of the Houthi Political Bureau in Yemen contributed “That virus has spread all over the world – the Jews are behind it. The Americans are behind it... . the virus is American. American instructors came to a development workshop in the Chinese

¹⁷⁸ Ahmad Rif’at, Vetogate.com, January 27, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Sa’ud Al-Shehry, “It’s No Coincidence That the Coronavirus Has Skipped Over Israel and the US,” *Al-Watan* (Saudi Arabia), February 2, 2020.

¹⁸⁰ Hussein Sager, “The Coronavirus Epidemic is an Artificial Crisis Intended to Undermine China’s Economy,” *Al-Thawra*, February 3, 2020. All three of the above items can be found in “Arab Writers: The Coronavirus is Part of Biological Warfare Waged by the US Against China,” Special Dispatch no 8541, The Middle East Media Research Institute, February 6, 2020.

¹⁸¹ The Middle East Media Research Institute, “Palestinian-American Academic Seif Da’na on Hizbullah TV: Coronavirus May have Leaked from US Lab,” Special Dispatch no 8667, April 1, 2020.

city in Wuhan. As soon as these instructors left Wuhan, the virus broke out. [there]. ...it was developed in the American labs to become lethal.”¹⁸²

- In Syria, a former member of the Kuwaiti Parliament stated that “the coronavirus, which is artificial, was deliberately developed by the US in order to save its economy from collapse, in light of the booming Chinese economy. He added that the US’s development and spread of the virus – its ‘great, barbaric manipulation against humanity’ – was according to a plan by ‘the Zionist Freemasons, the Rothschilds, and the Rockefellers’ who control the American empire and seek to prevent its fall and to renew their global control.”¹⁸³
- In the second week of December 2020, the Taliban of Pakistan published an article in their Urdu-language jihadi magazine by a Mufti Abu Misbah explaining that the “Jews and their puppets” were responsible for the coronavirus pandemic, and that the virus “has been kept hidden since the 1960s in order to be used against Muslims.”¹⁸⁴

What might not have been expected was that the Chinese government would launch a BW disinformation campaign on the Russian model, something that it had not done since the end of the Korean War. On March 12, 2020, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian posted a link on his social media account to an article published by *Global Research*, an organization that has already been identified as a Russian SVR proxy site, blaming the United States for the origins of the coronavirus. The *Global Research* article argued that “the only possibility for the origination [of the COVID-2019 virus] would be the US.... . . . And it may therefore be true that the original source of the COVID-19 virus was the US military bio-warfare lab at Fort Detrick.”¹⁸⁵ Over a dozen Chinese embassies—in South Africa, Maldives, Botswana, Suriname, Iran, France, Philippines, Jordan, Chad, Uganda, Pakistan, Cameroon, and Germany—reposted the item, followed by an additional 12,000 social media repostings. *Zero Hedge*, another Russian

¹⁸² “Houthi Politician Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Mahbashi: The Jews, US Are Behind Corona Virus Pandemic,” The Middle East Media Research Institute, April 1, 2020.

¹⁸³ “The Coronavirus Is An American-Zionist Plot Aimed at Saving the US Economy and Restoring the Rothschilds’ Global Control,” Al-Thawra, May 18, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Mufti Abu Misbah, “The Coronavirus and the Background Realities,” quoted in Middle East Media Research Institute, no. 9080, December 10, 2020.

¹⁸⁵ Larry Romanoff, “COVID-19: Further Evidence that the Virus Originated in the US,” *Global Research*, March 11, 2020.

BW disinformation proxy site, then wrote about Zhao's post.¹⁸⁶ The head of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Department of Information, Hua Chunying, followed suit, as did a third Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Geng Shuang.¹⁸⁷ In a renewed round, Geng's remarks were also distributed by various Chinese ambassadors. This set of interactions was the initiation of collaboration between entities of the Chinese government and Russian proxy disinformation outlets. Zhao followed with several tweets of his own to some half a million Twitter followers republished by *China Daily Online*, *People's Daily Online*, and *Global Times*:

CDC Director Robert Redfield admitted some Americans who seemingly died from influenza were tested positive for novel coronavirus in the posthumous diagnosis, during the House Oversight Committee Wednesday. ... CDC was caught on the spot. When did patient zero begin in US? How many people were infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation.¹⁸⁸

Chinese disinformation continued, and went from bad to worse. On April 17, the Chinese ambassador to Russia, Zhang Hanwei, stated that the SARS-CoV-2 virus "was imported to China's Wuhan, instead of emerging there."¹⁸⁹ "Numerous facts indicate that the source of COVID-19 has not been identified yet and point towards various regions." Some of the regions that he suggested were Hawaii, elsewhere in the US and the Lombardy area of Italy. Chinese sources also suggested that US military participants in the Military World Games that had been held in Wuhan in October 2019 had brought the virus to the city.

¹⁸⁶ Julian E. Barnes et al., "China and Russia Sow Disinformation About How US is Handling the Virus," *New York Times*, March 29, 2020; "Editorial: Playing with people's lives: The coronavirus gives Russia and China another opportunity to spread their disinformation," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2020.

¹⁸⁷ Terry Glavin, "The coronavirus pandemic is the breakthrough Xi Jinping has been waiting for," *Macleans*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/the-coronavirus-pandemic-is-the-breakthrough-xi-jinping-has-been-waiting-for-and-hes-making-his-move/>.

¹⁸⁸ "US army might have brought epidemic to China, says Chinese FM spokesman in tweet," *People's Daily Online*, March 13, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0313/c90000-9668143.html>. See also "Outspoken diplomat suspects US as source of virus," *Global Times*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1182511.shtml>; Elise Thomas, "Chinese diplomats and Western fringe media outlets push the same coronavirus conspiracies," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, March 24, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/chinese-diplomats-and-western-fringe-media-outlets-push-the-same-coronavirus-conspiracies/>.

¹⁸⁹ Tass, "Ambassador says coronavirus imported to China, points to genetic sequence as proof," April 17, 2020, <https://tass.com/world/1146127>.

The state-run China Global Television Network produced a video targeting viewers in the Middle East in which a presenter speaking Arabic asserted that “some new facts” indicated that the pandemic might have originated from American participants in a military sports competition in October in Wuhan. The network has an audience of millions, and the video has had more than 365,000 views on YouTube.¹⁹⁰

One version of this fiction suggested US military athletes had brought the virus to Wuhan in vases which they buried under the fish and live animal market.

In April and May 2020, official Chinese government media outlets initiated an entirely new stage of BW disinformation. They began to repeat four of the central themes of Russian BW disinformation: attacks on the Lugar Center in Georgia, claims that the United States intended to produce “ethnic” biological weapons, that Russia was surrounded by US biological weapons laboratories and that the United States had 200 or more such facilities spread across the globe. On April 29, a CCTV broadcast with Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang directly repeated Russian Foreign Ministry disinformation about US Nunn-Lugar supported facilities in former Soviet CIS states, claiming that these were “instructed by USDOD agencies to study dangerous diseases targeting specific groups among which many projects are banned within the United States.” Geng added: “We noted the Russian foreign ministry spokesperson’s remarks and related reports. The US established multiple biological laboratories in former USSR countries but kept its mouth shut regarding the labs’ functions, purposes and safety, causing deep concerns from local people and surrounding countries.”¹⁹¹

On May 21, 2020, the Chinese government CGTN TV channel took another step forward in copying from earlier Russian government BW disinformation with a more elaborate posting. It posted a map of Africa showing nine ostensible US “military biological laboratories” in nine different African countries with the following caption: “The United States has deployed more than 200 military biological laboratories across the world. Among them, more than 30 have been exposed. The rest are hidden in unknown places. Do these laboratories develop biological and

¹⁹⁰ Edward Wong et al., “Chinese Agents Spread Messages that Sowed Virus Panic in US, Officials Say,” *New York Times*, April 22, 2020, <https://cn.nytimes.com/usa/20200422/coronavirus-china-disinformation/en-us/>.

¹⁹¹ Isobel Cockerell, “China and Russia Join Forces against US-Owned Bio Labs,” *Coda Story* (blog), May 1, 2020, <https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/china-russia-against-us-labs/>.

chemical weapons? Or use lethal viruses and bacteria: What's the true purpose of these biological laboratories?"¹⁹² There was no explanation as to how the number of 200 was known since the alleged laboratories were "hidden in unknown places." There are in fact no such US "200 military biological laboratories across the world."

On May 14, 2020, China's *Global Times*, wrote:

Washington has taken advantage of the scientific resources and political vacuum left by the collapsed former Soviet Union to set up biological laboratories in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries around Russia that, some suspect, are performing riskier experiments than those in the US. Research carried out by those laboratories and their safety should be the focus of international attention....

It is reasonable to be highly suspicious that the security of the US' vast biological laboratories is substandard, and that there are a lot of "dirty tricks" going on inside for fear that the outside world will find out. Through this ongoing outbreak, the international community should truly regulate biological research in the US and urge it to reach the basic level of transparency. The US should not be exempted from international screening for biological risks, but rather be at the forefront of such inspections. The vast number of laboratories in the US, with their complex and diverse management bodies and methods, needs a clean-up test that will reassure the international community.¹⁹³

On August 5, 2020, the comments of yet another Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, could have been written by any of the Russian BW disinformation platforms. A reporter from the *Beijing Youth Daily* noted that reports from South Korea indicated that US forces were undertaking "biological militarization" there and elsewhere, and that they have "conducted

¹⁹² China Global Television Network, "China mouthpiece claims over 200 US military labs," <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-21/U-S-deployed-over-200-military-biological-laboratories-worldwide-QFtLkqhuVy/index.html>. See also, Jessica Brandt and Torrey Taussig, "The Kremlin's disinformation playbook goes to Beijing: China has abandoned its low profile for a high-stakes strategy," Brookings, May 19, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/05/19/the-kremlins-disinformation-playbook-goes-to-beijing/>.

¹⁹³ "US should make bio-labs more transparent," *Global Times*, May 14, 2020.

activities violating the Biological Weapon Convention” in South Korea. Wang Wenbin replied that

first, those US biological militarization activities are not transparent. Many of the countries involved have no idea what the US military labs are doing. The US is the one that has conducted the largest number of biological militarization activities overseas, none of which is mentioned in the CBMs submitted by the United States to the BWC. Second, they are not safe. Many of their activities are closely related to high-risk pathogens. If any accident occurs, it will have disastrous consequences for the country concerned, its neighbors and the whole world. Third, they are unjustified. Looking around, only the US, spearheaded by its military, is building biological labs around the world and collecting without restraint biological resources abroad, and only the US is opposed to negotiating a BWC verification protocol. No matter how the US explains it, it cannot justify itself. We urge the US side to act in an open, transparent and responsible manner, take the concerns of the international community seriously, clarify its overseas biological militarization activities, earnestly fulfill its BWC obligations, and stop standing alone in the way of negotiations on a BWC verification protocol.¹⁹⁴

Within six months, the fledgling Chinese government BW disinformation program had entered a new era. In early July 2020, a Chinese-born expert on Chinese medical issues suggested that the Chinese government had initiated its BW disinformation effort to counteract the very significant public reaction in China at the death of Dr Li Wenliang, the “whistleblower” in Wuhan.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps that might have been conceivable for the initiation of the Chinese government BW disinformation effort in March 2020, but it became altogether implausible after its subsequent transformation and continuation. And it certainly was not the explanation for the massive, fiercely aggressive campaign that would follow at the end of 2020 and into 2021. The several evolutions to this point were only the introduction to the final phase to follow.

¹⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on August 4, 2020,” https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1803971.shtml.

¹⁹⁵ Dr Yanzhong Huang (Council on Foreign Relations), PBS Newshour, July 2020.

At the end of November 2020, Chinese authorities renewed Coronavirus disinformation, however not now directed at the US. They suggested multiple locations other than Wuhan or China from which the virus might have first originated. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated “More and more research suggests that the pandemic was likely to have been caused by separate outbreaks in multiple places in the world.”¹⁹⁶ One suggestion was that the virus had been brought to the Wuhan market in imported frozen seafood.¹⁹⁷ “All available evidence suggests that [the coronavirus] did not start in central China’s Wuhan, but may come into China through imported frozen food products and their packing,” the *People’s Daily* wrote, quoting Dr Zeng Guang, chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.¹⁹⁸ A publication by Chinese researchers claimed that a strain of the virus could “be traced to eight countries from four continents before the Wuhan outbreak.”¹⁹⁹ These two new themes became prominent in anticipation of the arrival of the group of independent scientists representing the World Health Organization who were due to arrive in China in late January and visit Wuhan, the city in which the pandemic began.

The key events that motivated the fiercest onslaught of Chinese disinformation in the first months of 2021 were:

- as indicated, the arrival in China in January 2021 of an independent expert team representing the WHO that would visit Wuhan;

¹⁹⁶ James Griffiths, “China’s latest potential culprit in its search for foreign coronavirus sources? Auto parts packing,” CNN, January 5, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/05/china/china-car-parts-foreign-coronavirus-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Christian Shepherd, “Chinese media step up campaign to muddy probe into Covid origins,” *Financial Times*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/edda14d0-145b-42e4-a1d2-4d64ab73bda1>.

¹⁹⁸ James Griffiths, “China’s latest potential culprit in its search for foreign coronavirus sources? Auto parts packing,” CNN, January 5, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/05/china/china-car-parts-foreign-coronavirus-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Chen, “Coronavirus was on many continents before Wuahn outbreak, Chinese team says,” *South China Morning Post*, November 27, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3111545/coronavirus-was-many-continents-wuhan-outbreak-chinese-team-says>. See also Stephen Chen, “Coronavirus hunters pick up another piece of the trail in Italy,” *South China Morning Post*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3110088/covid-19-virus-hunters-pick-another-piece-trail-italy> and Lee Brown, “China suggests Italy may be the birthplace of COVID-19 pandemic,” *New York Post*, November 20, 2020, <https://nypost.com/2020/11/20/china-suggests-italy-may-be-the-birthplace-of-covid-19-pandemic/>.

- a preemptive press conference that the Chinese authorities staged on February 9, 2021 presaging the substance of the joint report prepared by the international team together with Chinese authorities. The report notably was not a WHO report;
- the release of the report on March 30, 2021;
- a generally negative international response to the report as being inadequate, including a statement by the Secretary-General of the WHO taking sharp exception to the report;²⁰⁰
- a sharply increased receptivity to the possibility that the pandemic may have resulted from an accidental laboratory infection of one or more researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which was carrying out gain-of-function research with bat SARS coronaviruses under inadequate biosafety provisions (BL2 and BL3 instead of BL4).²⁰¹
- four open letters to the WHO published by a group of scientists and data specialists criticizing the joint Chinese-independent team report;²⁰²
- finally, the announcement by President Biden on May 26, 2021 that he would ask the US intelligence community to provide a report in 90 days evaluating the two possible origins of the Covid-19 pandemic: a natural “spillover” to humans by a pathogen hosted in a wild animal population or an accidental release from a virology research institute in Wuhan, China.

These events released a flood of vituperative disinformation from official Chinese government sources over a period of seven months. By now the reason for the Chinese government’s disinformation was obvious. From the very beginning it was a consistent effort to defend the

²⁰⁰ <https://www.who.int/news/item/30-03-2021-who-calls-for-further-studies-data-on-origin-of-sars-cov-2-virus-reiterates-that-all-hypotheses-remain-open>

²⁰¹ Milton Leitenberg, “Did the SARS-CoV-2 virus arise from a bat coronavirus research program in a Chinese laboratory? Very possibly,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 4, 2020, <https://thebulletin.org/2020/06/did-the-sars-cov-2-virus-arise-from-a-bat-coronavirus-research-program-in-a-chinese-laboratory-very-possibly/> and Nicholas Wade, “The origin of COVID: Did people or nature open Pandora’s box at Wuhan?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May 5, 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/2021/05/the-origin-of-covid-did-people-or-nature-open-pandoras-box-at-wuhan/>

²⁰² Open Letter 1: March 4, 2021: Reaction to the China-WHO joint press conference on 9 Feb 2021, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.26695.83368/1>; Open Letter 2: April 7, 2021, Reaction to the China-WHO joint study team report, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25018.11206/1>; Open Letter 3: April 30, 2021: Open Letter to the World Health Organization and the Members of its Executive Board ahead of the World Health Assembly (May 2021), (2021). <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.18097.51041/2>; Open Letter 4: June 28, 2021. Call for a Comprehensive Investigation of the Origin of SARS-CoV-2, if Possible with Chinese Government Participation, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.21927.27042/1>

government's and the Party's narrative against anything that might suggest that reality was different from that portrayed by the leadership: that it had protected the Chinese people and that China was not responsible for anything that had taken place. Patently false disinformation would not seem to be the best way to make this argument, but it was obviously the means chosen by the Chinese government.

There were two main actors who distributed the Chinese disinformation. The first was the several spokespersons of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, led by the most prominent “wolf warrior,” Zhao Lijuan.²⁰³ They made their comments during their regular daily press briefings, which were then picked up by multiple Chinese newspapers, TV channels and news agencies. The second major player was the *Global Times*, the English-language daily tabloid that is a subsidiary of *The People's Daily*, the main daily newspaper produced by the Communist Party of China. The same charges are repeated over and over. The most prominent one is that the SARS virus was produced at and leaked from “Fort Detrick,” pointing out that “Fort Detrick” was closed for several months beginning in August 2019. The Chinese actually mean the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), and there is nothing secret about its temporary closure. It was due to inadequate waste water treatment, which was extensively reported in the press. Fort Detrick, which also houses research facilities of the US National Cancer Institute, Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Homeland Security, was never closed. Nonetheless, it led to a full year of Chinese hectoring that the US should “open-up Fort Detrick,” not “cover-up” and be “as transparent” as China by inviting international inspection of “Fort Detrick.” In fact, USAMRIID has been “open” since a Russian deputy minister visited in 1971. Scientific researchers from Nato nations regularly work at USAMRIID and visitors from eastern European countries were frequent in the early 1990s. Researchers from China have even worked at USAMRIID. Chinese intelligence agencies know all this, of course, which adds a particularly nasty quality to the aggressive Chinese disinformation campaign.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Olivier Bonhomme, “Voice of China,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/07/magazine/china-diplomacy-twitter-zhao-lijian.html>. Zhao's tweets gain millions of views.

²⁰⁴ Eduardo Baptista and Cyril Ip, “China is pushing its own coronavirus lab leak theory in latest battle of narratives,” *South China Morning Post*, July 20, 2021,

The Chinese foreign ministry spokespersons have also featured the fiction adopted from Russian intelligence agency disinformation that the US maintains 200 bio-weapon laboratories around the world. They included the allegations that these facilities were investigating “ethnic weapons”. Two years of research has failed to identify “200 US bio labs worldwide,” unless this refers to every medical clinic at US overseas bases. The Chinese Foreign Ministry charges even reintroduced fraudulent Korean war bio-weapon allegations, claimed that the World War 2 Japanese Unit 731 was connected to “Fort Detrick,” and adopted a Chinese commentator’s line that “The United States is not without a record of biological warfare.”

Two peaks in Chinese disinformation occurred just before and during the WHO mission to China in January-March 2021, and during the last week of May 2021 during the World Health Assembly, when that body met to discuss how the WHO should continue its investigation for the source of the Covid-19 pandemic in China, and if so, how. China vociferously opposes any further WHO investigation in China and argues that further investigations should take place in the US – at “Fort Detrick.” References to only a very few of the *Global Times* articles are provided below by way of example.²⁰⁵

Between a statement by Zhao Lijian in a press conference on May 27, 2021 and the first week of July 2021, 35 Chinese officials and state media outlets mentioned Fort Detrick in more than 115 tweets in nine languages, and since March 2020, more than 400 Chinese articles, videos, press conferences and tweets referred to “Fort Detrick”. In January 2021, after the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman repeated the “Fort Detrick” disinformation, the term topped the Chinese Weibo social media platform, and on Google, “Fort Detrick” became most associated with

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3141823/china-pushing-its-own-coronavirus-lab-leak-theory-latest>.

²⁰⁵ Hu Xijin, “US elites degenerate further in morality, and Fauci is one of them,” *Global Times*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1224480.shtml>; “Editorial: Time to probe Fort Detrick biolab despite US hype,” *Global Times*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1224597.shtml>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian’s Regular Press Conference on May 28, 2021,” https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1879399.shtml; “COVID-19 origins-tracing hindered by politics not from China, but US: Chinese FM,” *Global Times*, April 8, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1220562.shtml>; David Stanway, “Chinese embassy in US says politicising COVID-19 origins hampers investigations,” Reuters, May 27, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/chinese-embassy-us-says-politicising-covid-19-origins-hampers-investigations-2021-05-27/>; and Katerina Ang and Adam Taylor, “China lashes out after US urges focus on covid origins,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/27/virus-china-fort-detrick/>.

“Wuhan” and “coronavirus.” And since February 2020, Chinese officials and state media posted over 185 tweets alleging the existence of “200” US biological laboratories around the world.²⁰⁶

It is of course an added irony that while Chinese authorities insist fiercely that a laboratory escape is impossible as the source of the pandemic – at least in China – they suggest that a lab escape is responsible – in the United States. They also suggest that it may have appeared first in France, Italy, Spain or Brazil. The Chinese pattern of suggesting multiple conflicting narratives is of course exactly the same as the Russian government did in its Covid disinformation campaign, as well as in the two Novichok poisonings and the MH-17 incident, among others. In addition, China’s blaming of other countries for the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic is exactly what it did when the first SARS pandemic broke out in 2002 in Guangdong province in China.²⁰⁷

The great irony of the litany of 14 years of Russian BW disinformation that has just been surveyed is that these false allegations of US development, possession and use of biological weapons were made by Russian government officials or platforms during the same years that the Russian government was responsible for blatant use of toxins, radiological isotopes, and an advanced organophosphate chemical agent for purposes of assassination, as well as vigorously supporting the Syrian government’s use of Sarin and other chemical weapons over a period of six years, in open violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This record began with the poisoning of Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko, a reformer at odds with the Kremlin. Yushchenko was apparently poisoned early in September 2004 using dioxin (TCDD) at the height of a contentious Ukrainian presidential election campaign. It is not clear if the poisoning was intended to cause death or just disfigurement.²⁰⁸ The poisoning apparently took place at a dinner with senior Ukrainian officials, including the

²⁰⁶ Bret Schafer, “China Fires Back at Biden with Conspiracy Theories About Maryland Lab,” *Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/09/china-fires-back-at-biden-with-conspiracy-theories-about-maryland-lab/>.

²⁰⁷ Milton Leitenberg, “China versus SARS,” *CBRNWorld*, June 29, 2021, <https://cbrnworld.com/categories/related-articles/2021-06/china-versus-sars>. Apparently after reading this paper, the Chinese Foreign Ministry used “USAMRIID” for the first time ever in July 2021.

²⁰⁸ Martin Mckee, “The Poisoning of Victor Yushchenko,” *Lancet*, August 5, 2009, pp. 1-2, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)61027-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61027-8); O. Sorg et al., “2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD) poisoning in Victor Yushchenko: Identification and measurement of TCDD metabolite,” *Lancet*, August 5, 2009, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)60912-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60912-0).

head of the Ukrainian security agency, an organization, which was at that time heavily penetrated by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Significantly, there was apparently only one organization in Russia in 2004 that produced and stocked dioxin: RIHTOP, the Research Institute of Hygiene, Toxicology and Occupational Pathology in Volgograd.²⁰⁹ The KGB apparently had also used dioxin in an attempt to poison Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1984. The use of poisons by Soviet intelligence agencies literally goes back to their origin, first with “Laboratory #1” in 1922, which evolved into “Laboratory #12,” housed in a dedicated KGB building in Moscow. “Laboratory #12,” or the Scientific Research Institute #2, NII-2. It became a more serious KGB activity after 1937. It existed as long as the USSR did, and it clearly has continued to exist until today, as was documented in detail in 2020.²¹⁰ The identification of the Russian agencies and institutes that carried out the poisoning of Alexei Navalny indicated where the poisoning program was presently located in Russian government structures.²¹¹

The second much more internationally notorious event was the poisoning of Aleksandr Litvinenko, a former lieutenant colonel in the Russian FSB in London on November 1, 2006, by two of his former colleagues using the radioactive isotope, Polonium 210.²¹² Polonium 210 is made by irradiating Bismuth in a nuclear reactor. Once again, as in the case of dioxin production in Russia, the isotope was only produced at a single facility in Russia, the nuclear reactor at the Avangard facility in the closed city of Sarov, previously known as Arzamas-16. It is the world’s only commercial producer of Polonium-210.²¹³ The isotope has a very short half-life of 100 days and it must have been made very shortly before use. It is a pure alpha emitter, emitting no gamma rays, which makes it relatively safe to handle and no shielding is needed to carry it.

²⁰⁹ Research Institute of Hygiene, Toxicology and Occupational Pathology (RIHTOP), Federal Directorate for Medical, Biological and Extreme Problems at Russian Ministry of Health (MedBioExtreme), <http://www.rihtop.ru/>.

²¹⁰ Vadim J. Birstein, *The Perversion of Knowledge: The True Story of Soviet Science* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001); Luke Harding, “Russia’s Lab X: poison factory that helped silence Soviet critics,” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/09/russia-lab-x-poison-factory-that-helped-silence-soviets-critics>.

²¹¹ Bellingcat, “Hunting the Hunters: How We Identified Navalny's FSB Stalkers,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/2020/12/14/navalny-fsb-methodology/>.

²¹² Alex Goldfarb with Marina Litvinenko, *Death of a Dissident: The Poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko and the Return of the KGB* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007).

²¹³ Neil Buckley, “Polonium that killed Litvinenko came from Russian plant, UK court told,” *The Financial Times*, March 11, 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/fb368c7a-c804-11e4-8210-00144feab7de>.

However, it has the notorious ability to “creep” out of any container except one made by fusing the glass container holding it. If that is not done, it will contaminate laboratories and anywhere else that it is stored or carried. It was for this reason that the two Russian intelligence agents, one from the FSB and one from GRU who brought the Polonium to London, left an easily identifiable trail of the isotope across countries and continents: on the seats of the airplanes in which they travelled, in the hotel rooms in which they stayed, the offices they visited, and finally, in the café and on the teapot and teacups in which they managed to place the isotope in Litvinenko’s tea. They had come to London carrying Polonium 210 twice before, on October 16 and October 25, 2006, but had been unable to administer the isotope to Litvinenko. In each case, they jettisoned what they had in their London hotel bathrooms and returned to Moscow to obtain a new sample.²¹⁴

Putin had taken the trouble to have a law passed in the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, the Federation Council, in July 2006, which permitted “...the Russian president to use the country’s armed forces and special services outside Russia’s borders to combat terrorism and extremism.... The law also defines those slandering the individual occupying the post of president of the Russian Federation” as extremists.”²¹⁵ It was understood that “to combat” meant to kill political opponents. The law specified that the president alone, and apparently without consultation, could make the decision. Accordingly, Litvinenko, as well as the journalist Anna Politkovskaya and politician Boris Nemtsov, each of whom directly confronted Putin in print or in public statements, were assassinated.

Almost certainly, the primary reason for Litvinenko’s murder was his co-authorship of the book, *Blowing up Russia*, which attributed the multiple September 1999 apartment house bombings in Russia to the FSB, the successor of the KGB, then headed by Putin.²¹⁶ Four bombs exploded killing 300 people, and a fifth was discovered by police as it was being set in place by members

²¹⁴ Wikipedia, “Poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poisoning_of_Alexander_Litvinenko.

²¹⁵ Steven Eke, “Russian law on killing ‘extremists’ abroad,” BBC, November 27, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6188658.stm>.

²¹⁶ Alexander Litvinenko and Yuri Felshtinsky, *Blowing up Russia: Terror from Within* (New York, NY: SPI Books, 2002)/UK version, 2007). See also, David Satter, *The Less You Know, The Better You Sleep: Russia’s Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

of the FSB. Five members of the Russian Duma sought to establish a Duma investigating committee, but when that was denied they established themselves as an informal investigating committee. They hired a former FSB colleague of Litvinenko's, Mikhail Trepashkin, as their lawyer. One of the five was shot down in the street within a year, while a second was severely beaten by thugs but survived. When the family of a third, Yuri Shchekochikhin, who was also the editor of the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, saw the photographs years later of Litvinenko on his deathbed, they reported that Shchekochikhin had looked the same way on the last days before he died in a Moscow hospital in July 2003.²¹⁷ The hospital doctors claimed that he had died of an unknown "allergy," but all the hospital records were confiscated by the FSB and classified as State Secret. Shchekochikhin's family was not permitted to have access to his body or to have an autopsy performed. He had been "treated" and held in the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow, which is "tightly controlled by the Russian Federal Security Service [FSB] because it treats top-ranking Russian officials."²¹⁸ Shchekochikhin was the editor of the *Novaya Gazeta* reporter, Anna Politkovskaya, who was shot and killed while investigating the apartment house bombings.²¹⁹ Trepashkin was arrested, and Litvinenko had by then fled to the UK. The Litvinenko-Felshtinsky book, and the unofficial Duma committee, were an obvious and direct threat to the legitimacy of Putin's rule. Sir Robert Owen's report investigating Litvinenko's death for the British government suggested that Nikolai Patrushev, Director of the FSB, and President Vladimir Putin both approved the assassination mission. In the Soviet era, such tasks had been the responsibility of the Thirteenth Department of the KGB.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Tim Whewell, BBC Newsnight, transcript, February 7 and February 8, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/6342087.stm>. In the same video, Whewell interviewed General Alexander Guskov, Litvinenko's former superior in the FSB. Guskov stated that Litvinenko was guilty of "Treason....I consider him a direct traitor....I was brought up on Soviet law. That provides for the death penalty for treason, Article 64." Guskov admitted that he was asked what to do about Litvinenko, and smirking broadly then claimed that he did not advise that they kill Litvinenko. Tim Whewell, BBC Newsnight correspondent, email communication with author, February 16, 2007. Putin had also publicly pronounced Litvinenko to be "a traitor...for which he should be punished" in a TV interview.

²¹⁸ Wikipedia, "Poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poisoning_of_Alexander_Litvinenko.

²¹⁹ Wikipedia, "Yuri Shchekochikhin, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Shchekochikhin.

²²⁰ Sir Robert Owen (Chairman), *The Litvinenko Inquiry. Report into the death of Alexander Litvinenko*, 21 January 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/493860/The-Litvinenko-Inquiry-H-C-695-web.pdf; John R. Schindler, "The Return of Wetwork: KGB Goons Radiated a Former Associate in London, Putin's Kremlin employs assassination abroad as state policy in a manner not seen in Moscow since Stalin," *Observer*, January 24, 2016, <https://observer.com/2016/01/the-return-of-wetwork-kgb-goons-radiated-a->

The Russian government response to all the publicly available evidence and to the charges by the UK government that Russia was responsible for Litvinenko's murder became emblematic of subsequent incidents:

- a massive outpouring of denials and disinformation, supplying multiple alternative explanations, many of which contradicted one another
- counterattack and counteraccusations
- non-cooperation with investigations carried out outside Russian borders (refusal to permit access to an Aeroflot plane that one of the Litvinenko perpetrators had travelled in)
- no investigation within Russian borders, and promotion and protection of the perpetrator(s)
- telling the British government “You are spoiling good relations.” This had also been a constant Soviet-era rhetorical response when the Swedish government charged that Soviet submarines were operating in Swedish in-shore waters in the early 1980s. The Swedish government was told that “Your complaints are spoiling Russian-Swedish relations.”²²¹
- starting roughly on November 28, 2006, blocking access to the BBC Russian Service within Russia.

Interestingly, in September 1979, the US and Soviet governments had jointly proposed a multilateral Treaty Banning Radiological Weapons.²²² The proposed treaty would have prohibited the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition by other means or possession or use of radiological weapons. “A ‘radiological weapon’ is defined as any device, including any weapon or equipment, other than a nuclear explosive device, specifically designed to employ

[former-associate-in-london/](#); Wikipedia, “Poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poisoning_of_Alexander_Litvinenko; Jamie Grierson, “Litvinenko Inquiry: Russia involved in spy’s death, Scotland Yard Says, *The Guardian*, 30 July 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/30/litvinenko-inquiry-russia-involved-spy-death-scotland-yard>; Luke Harding, “Litvinenko Inquiry told Dmitry Kovtun planned to lure him to ‘finish him off,’” *The Guardian*, 24 July 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/24/litvinenko-inquiry-told-dmitry-kovtun-planned-to-lure-him-to-finish-him-off>.

²²¹ Milton Leitenberg, *Soviet Submarine Operations in Swedish Waters, 1980-1986*, CSIS, The Washington Papers, 1987.

²²² US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *US and USSR Proposed Multilateral Treaty Banning Radiological Weapons*, Publication 103, September 1979.

radioactive material by disseminating it to cause destruction, damage or injury by means of the radiation produced by the decay of such material....”²²³

The third event took place on March 4, 2018. It involved the use of an advanced organophosphorus nerve agent, A-324, in the so-called “Novichok” family to attempt to kill another former Russian intelligence officer living in the UK: Sergei Skripal, a colonel in the Russian military intelligence agency, the GRU. The intended victim and his daughter survived only because of specific and rapidly applied pharmacological countermeasures and intensive care. In the Litvinenko case the two Russian assassination agents were former colleagues of Litvinenko, they had been in correspondence and Litvinenko knew in advance that they were coming to meet him. In the Skripal case, the British authorities had extensive video evidence of the assassins’ arrival at the airport, travel in the London Underground, walking in the streets of Salisbury, and so on. Despite the fact that they travelled on false passports, a non-governmental research team, Bellingcat, was able to quickly discover their identities, their GRU affiliation and prior military deployment, records of travels around Europe, cell phone records, personal biographies and much more.²²⁴ The perpetrators have now been identified as belonging to a highly secret group within the GRU, named Unit 29155.²²⁵ Two of the three GRU officers involved in the Salisbury UK use of the Novichok agent were also involved in an attempt to kill a Bulgarian arms dealer in 2015 using an unidentified organophosphorus agent.²²⁶ The clear

²²³ “The Prohibition of Radiological Warfare” *World Armaments and Disarmament SIPRI Yearbook 1980* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 1980), pp. 381.

²²⁴ Bellingcat, “Skripal Poisoning Suspect’s Passport Data Shows Link to Security Services,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/14/skripal-poisoning-suspects-passport-data-shows-link-security-services/>; Bellingcat, “Skripal Suspects Confirmed GRU Operatives’ Prior European Operations Disclosed,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/20/skripal-suspects-confirmed-gru-operations-prior-european-operations-disclosed/>; Bellingcat, “Skripal Suspect Boshirov Identified as GRU Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/26/skripal-suspect-boshirov-identified-gru-colonel-anatoliy-chepiga/>; Bellingcat, “Full report: Skripal Poisoning Suspect Dr. Alexander Mishkin, Hero of Russia,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/10/09/full-report-skripal-poisoning-suspect-dr-alexander-mishkin-hero-russia/>; Bellingcat, “Third Skripal Suspect Linked to 2015 Bulgaria Poisoning,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/02/07/third-skripal-suspect-linked-to-2015-bulgaria-poisoning/>.

²²⁵ Michael Schwartz, “Secret Spy Unit In Russia Aims to Jolt Europe,” *New York Times*, October, 2019.

²²⁶ “Bulgaria Reopens Poisoning Case, Citing Possible Link to Russia and Skripal Attack,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2019.

identification of the GRU officers made no difference to the Russian government response, which was derision, disinformation, denial, obfuscation, obstruction, and counter-accusation.

Russian authorities suggested that the perpetrators might be from the US, from the UK, Sweden or the Czech Republic and a half dozen additional countries because of their knowledge of Novichok chemistry. Russian authorities directly or indirectly offered a large number of different possible explanations for the events, any one of which, were it true, would falsify all the others. The British government-funded Integrity Initiative claimed that Russian authorities or agencies had provided 30 such alternative explanations. Russian government agencies and officials had similarly quickly suggested five different mutually exclusive and contradictory explanations for the shooting down of the Malaysian MH-17 airliner over Ukraine, and soon after, many more.

In regard to multiple disinformation theories presented by Russian sources regarding the Skripal poisoning events

Coverage of the Skripal incident on RT and Sputnik was abundant, with 735 articles on the story published across both sites over the four weeks following the discovery of the poisoning.

In total, 138 separate – and often contradictory – narratives explaining the incident and its aftermath were published by RT and Sputnik during this period, ranging from interpretations of Western motives, to explanations of the origins of the nerve agent used in the poisoning, to full-blown conspiracy theories....

The most frequently repeated narratives supporting the Russian position asserted that Russia's willingness to cooperate was being rejected by the West, that there was no evidence to prove Russian guilt, and that the Western response was driven by 'Russophobia' and hysteria. Theresa May's accusation of Russian guilt was frequently cited, but often immediately rebutted by editorial statements by RT or Sputnik.²²⁷

Because of the nature of the denial response patterns of the Russian government to events for which they were responsible, we should add two other major international events to this narrative, although they do not involve Russian government use of biological, chemical or

²²⁷ Gordon Ramsay and Sam Robertshaw, "Weaponising News: RT, Sputnik and targeted disinformation," The Policy Institute, Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power, King's College, London, nd.

radiological agents. The first is the shooting down of the Malaysian MH-17 passenger airliner over eastern Ukraine by a surface-to-air missile on July 12, 2014. The Dutch investigative group and Joint Investigative Team (JIT) identified the BUK missile launcher as belonging to the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of the Russian Federation.²²⁸ In this case, an intercepted recording was available in which the insurgents inside Ukraine supported by the Russian government reported to their GRU commander that one of their units had shot down a Ukrainian government “transport plane.” In response, Russian government agencies pulled out all the stops, adding falsified digital information to the customary flood of denials and disinformation: falsified satellite images and radar tracks, doctored videos and photographs, etc. in order to support a claim that a Ukrainian fighter plane had shot down the MH 17 airliner.

Between 2014 and 2020, Russia offered no fewer than 63 different explanations for the shooting down of the MH-17 and repeated these 301 times. Twitter accounts controlled by Russia’s Internet Research Agency posted 111,486 tweets, most of which said the airliner had been shot down by Ukrainians.

Year	Number of explanations	Number of repetitions
2014	11	41
2015	10	63
2016	9	51
2017	9	38
2018	11	57
2019	9	43
2020 [to March 9]	4	8
Source: “Kremlin Tactics to Discredit the JIT; Occupy the Information Space,” EU vs Disinformation, March 9, 2020		

The parallels to the overall pattern of Russian BW disinformation since 2006 is obvious. It is very different from the practice that was followed by the KGB in the design of the 1985-1987 AIDS disinformation project, and in the programs attacking the US-supported malaria research

²²⁸ “Bellingcat Report on Identification of the Russian BUK Missile Launcher that Shot Down the Malaysian Airlines MH 17 Flight Over Eastern Ukraine on July 12, 2014,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2014/11/08/origin-of-the-separatists -buk-a-bellingcat-investigation/>.

projects and institutes in India and Pakistan in the 1970s. Those all utilized a single false narrative and did not alter its content. However the post-2006 Russian BW disinformation design follows the same template that the Russian government has used in regard to the murder of Litvinenko in London, Syria's use of chemical weapons, the attempted murder of Skripal in the UK and, as just described, the shooting down of the Malaysian MH-17 airliner: a flood of fanciful fabrications and lies.²²⁹

At the end of April 2020, as part of Putin's historical revisionism about the origins of WW2, Russian officials introduced an entirely new disinformation campaign, accusing Finland of genocide against Russian civilians after the 1939 Russian invasion of Finland. The charges were made by a Committee of the Russian Duma [Parliament] that operates under President Putin's direction and included the claim that Finland had gassed Russian POWs during WW2.²³⁰

With the poisoning on August 20, 2020 of the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny with a Novichok-class organophosphorus nerve agent, Russian authorities and state media outlets once again followed the well-known pattern of releasing a contradictory mix of disinformation stories within a few days:

- that he had not been poisoned at all
- that he suffered from “dieting, excess drinking, stress, or fatigue,”
- that he suffered from “low blood sugar”
- that he had poisoned himself
- that he had misused medications
- that an enemy of Russia poisoned him
- that someone fabricated a poisoning that never occurred

²²⁹ One suggestion carried by a Russian state television channel was that the CIA had filled an airplane full of dead bodies and then destroyed it in order to provoke Western countries to impose economic sanctions on Russia.

²³⁰ “Russia Launches ‘genocide’ probe into Karelian WW2 camps,” April 21, 2020, https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/russia_launches_genocide_probe_into_karelian_ww2_camps/11315786; Jussi Nuorteva, “Genocide investigation launched in Russia raises astonishment – Finland investigated misconduct in East Karelia camps immediately after the Second World War,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, April 29, 2020.

- that German chemists had synthesized the Russian Novichok agent and poisoned Navalny with it once he was in Germany.²³¹

Aleksandr Lukashenko, the president of Belarus, obviously thought that Putin’s Kremlin had not thought of sufficient fake stories and informed the visiting Russian Prime Minister that his security services had intercepted a telephone call of Mrs. Merkel admitting that the poisoning was falsified: “There was no poisoning of Navalny, they did it...” Lukashenko added that he would hand over transcripts of the telephone conversation to Russia’s security services.²³² On September 2, Yury Shvytkin, Deputy Chairman of Russia’s Duma Defense Committee, told RIA Novosti: “As far as I’m informed, similar weapons, similar chemical poisoning substances are to be found in the Georgian territory from the US side, in the laboratory, and in the US.”²³³ Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin called the incident “a provocation” and other sources added that the purpose of the provocation was to force the termination of the NordStream 2 pipeline.²³⁴ A subsequent suggestion was that it was a provocation to disrupt forthcoming Russian elections.

The August 10, 2020 issue of *EUvsDISINFO* captioned its coverage “Salisbury all over again” and provided an informative chart titled “Pro-Kremlin Disinfo Narratives About Novichok Poisonings.” The chart displayed eight major themes that comprised the core of Russian disinformation at the time of the attempt in 2018 to kill the Skripals using a Novichok agent and how the same eight themes were being repeated in August-September 2020 with respect to the attempt to kill Navalny.²³⁵

In the case of Litvinenko, the Russian government had suggested, among numerous things, that Litvinenko had been drinking “too much tea;” with Navalny they suggested he had “too much

²³¹ Andrew E. Kramer, “The Spin From Moscow: Germany Did It, He Did It, Or There Was No Poison,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2020.

²³² Agence France Presse, “Belarus president claims Alexei Navalny poisoning was faked,” *The Guardian*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/03/navalny-poisoning-falsified-belarus-leader-claims-without-evidence>.

²³³ “Russian MP after Navalny Novichok Finding: Georgia Produces Nerve-Agents,” *civil.ge*, September 3, 2020, <https://civil.ge/archives/365012>.

²³⁴ Anastasia Golubeva, Elizaveta Fokht and Nikolay Voronin, “How did Navalny go through contact with Novichok? Why was he the only one affected? Toxicologists and chemical weapons experts answer,” BBC Russian Service, September 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-54061808>.

²³⁵ *EUvsDISINFO, Disinformation Review*, September 10, 2020.

coffee.” Russian government officials, including the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, also provided multiple reasons why they did not need to, could not, or should not initiate any investigation in Russia. However, by September 6, Russian officials were accusing the German government of impeding an investigation.

A 2016 RAND report describes the post-2006 methodology as the “Firehose of Falsehood Propaganda Model.”²³⁶ It appears to be immaterial if the multiple Russian MH-17, Skripal/Novichok, Navalny or Coronavirus disinformation releases are mutually contradictory within each group. It also appears to make no difference whether the various disinformation stories are immediately disprovable, or if they are patently ridiculous. In the case of the coronavirus, one release claimed that the virus had been produced in Latvia, while 20 or 30 other of the early releases claimed it had been produced in a US military laboratory and/or had been deployed by the US, the UK or the opposition in Belarus. One said that it was less harmful than the annual outbreaks of influenza and that pharmaceutical companies exaggerate its dangers in order to increase sales (although there is nothing salable that can counteract the coronavirus pathogen). Yet another said that it would end civilization. The RAND report states that “contemporary Russian propaganda makes little or no commitment to truth. This flies in the face of the conventional wisdom that the truth always wins.” RAND described the features of the method as: 1) high-volume and multichannel, 2) rapid, continuous and repetitive, 3) lacks commitment to objective reality, and 4) lacks commitment to consistency.²³⁷

An EU analysis describes the style of conflicting Russian disinformation messages as intended simply to produce confusion.²³⁸ Another EU study described the purpose of the Russian coronavirus disinformation program as being “...characteristic of the Kremlin’s well-established strategy of using disinformation to amplify divisions, sow distrust and chaos and exacerbate

²³⁶ Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian “Firehose of Falsehood” Propaganda Model. Why it might work and options to counter it.* PE-198-OSD [2016], https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE198/RAND_PE198.pdf.

²³⁷ It is worth noting that social media and the wider digital space provides a megaphone to amplify the lies and fabrications. This technology lends itself to this sort of campaign of lies and deceit.

²³⁸ “The Kremlin and Disinformation about Coronavirus,” EU vs DISINF, March 16, 2020. Boris Nemtsov’s widow reduced the purpose still further, “...to maintain Putin in power,” EU vs DISINF, February 26, 2020.

crisis situations and issues of public concern.”²³⁹ This is a much more operational set of purposes than the description of the “firehose” technique that is often given, to provide so many conflicting stories “that people do not know what to believe,” or believe nothing, or the somewhat flippant characterization “throw everything at the wall to see what sticks.”²⁴⁰

The second event that should be mentioned is the Russian government’s support of Syrian government use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war. Since the Syrian government’s use of the nerve agent sarin in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on August 21, 2013, the Russian government has repeatedly used its veto in the United Nations Security Council to defeat UNSC resolutions condemning Syrian use of CW. It has also rejected findings of OPCW investigative missions in Syria as well as those of the United Nations Secretary General’s Joint Investigating Mechanism (JIM). Russian officials also evolved one step further in their efforts at denial and disinformation: the construction and display of fabricated material items. “Patriot Park” is a theme park in the Moscow region devoted to Russian military hardware. In May 2019, a new display appeared, a “Sarin production lab from Syria,” ostensibly composed of equipment discovered by Syrian government forces in areas retaken from anti-government forces. The display was attended by Russian personnel in full dress chemical protective clothing.²⁴¹ The device placed in the Moscow park looks very much like a primitive whisky still from the backwoods of Kentucky in the 1920s US prohibition era. Any organic chemist would find it laughable as something pretending to be capable of producing the organophosphorus nerve agent sarin. Mark Kramer of the Harvard Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies commented:

²³⁹ EUvsDisinfo, “EEAS Special Report: Disinformation on the Coronavirus – Short Assessment of the Information Environment,” March 19, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-disinformation-on-the-coronavirus-short-assessment-of-the-information-environment/>.

²⁴⁰ The reader may be interested in seeing several other general studies on Russian disinformation published in recent years. Marcus Kolga, *Stemming the Virus: Understanding and responding to the threat of Russian disinformation*, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, January 2019; Irina Arabidze, “Russian Disinformation and Propaganda: Old Strategy in a New Cover?,” *The Pardee Periodical Journal of Global Affairs*, vol III, no. 1 (Spring 2018); Josh A. Goldstein and Shelby Grossman, *How disinformation evolved in 2020*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, January 4, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-disinformation-evolved-in-2020/>; George Barros, “Viral Disinformation: The Kremlin’s Coronavirus Information Operation in Ukraine,” Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, March 11, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/viral-disinformation-kremlin%E2%80%99s-coronavirus-information-operation-ukraine>.

²⁴¹ Dan Kaszeta, “Analysis of the Park Patriot ‘Sarin Lab’ in the Moscow Region,” <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/case-studies/2019/05/23/analysis-of-the-park-patriot-sarin-lab-in-the-moscow-region/>.

“Were Russia not the culpable party, the sheer stupidity of this sort of fakery would be stunning, but with Russia it’s just par for the course.”²⁴²

At the Fourth CWC Review Conference in November 2018 US, Ambassador Kenneth Ward stated:

Responsible states parties must continue to find ways to deter future CW use and restore the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. One of the founding principles of the CWC is to ‘exclude completely the possibility of use of chemical weapons,’ through implementation of the provisions of the CWC. The success of this principle depends entirely on the States Parties compliance with their obligations. When States Parties fail to meet these obligations, they must be held accountable. No one should think that they can develop, retain, use, or transfer chemical weapons and get away with it. Unfortunately, there are State Parties in this room that think their conduct has no consequences and that they can act with impunity.... The Syrian Arab Republic was found responsible for four attacks in 2014, 2015 and 2017. It likely would have been found responsible for additional chemical weapons use if Russia had not used its veto on the UN Security Council to block renewal of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism....

Let me turn now to Russia. In March 2018, only months after claiming to have completed destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile, Russia used an unscheduled, military-grade nerve agent in an assassination attempt on the Skripals in Salisbury, the United Kingdom....The use of this nerve agent in Salisbury demonstrates that Russia has not met its obligations under the CWC and still maintains a chemical weapons program, in clear violation of Article I. .. the Russian Federation actions to shield the Syrian regime from international accountability also make it complicit in the Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons.²⁴³

²⁴² Mark Kramer, Program Director, Project on Cold War Studies, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, email correspondence with author, May 27, 2019.

²⁴³ Amb. Kenneth D. Ward, U.S. Remarks at the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (REVCON IV), November 22, 2018, <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2018/11/23/remarks-at-the-fourth-special-session-of-the-conference-of-the-states-parties/>.

All of the events reviewed in the preceding section took place under Vladimir Putin's terms in office as President of Russia, 2000 to 2009 and 2012 to the present. Yet there was one more matter of concern.

In a somewhat bizarre development in February and March 2012 Putin and Russian Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov publicly referred to 28 tasks that Putin established for the RF-MOD in order "to prepare for threats of the future." Putin wrote that Russia needed to be prepared for "quick and effective responses to new challenges," and Task #4 of the 28 tasks that Putin specified was "The development of weapons based on new physical principles: radiation, geophysical, wave, genetic, psychophysical, etc."²⁴⁴

The "genetic" weapons in President Putin's 2013 remarks would obviously be forbidden by the Biological Weapons Convention, and the remainder of his shopping list – "*weapons based on new physical principles: radiation, geophysical, wave, psychophysical*" -- are an arms control nightmare that would explicitly contravene the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or any other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Technologies, or "ENMOD. ENMOD was a multilateral arms control treaty that was championed by the Soviet Union under the Brezhnev administration, and was signed on May 18, 1977 and entered into force on October 5, 1978. Within a month, by April 4, 2012, Putin's "Task #4" had been removed from the Russian government websites where it had previously been posted.²⁴⁵

In May 2014, this author testified to a US congressional subcommittee on the subject of the biological weapon program of the former USSR. Three other analysts also made presentations – David Franz, Christopher Davis, Amy Smithson. However, my own testimony took particular note of the Putin-Serdyukov material from 2012.²⁴⁶ This prompted a response by official Russian

²⁴⁴ David Hoffman, "Genetic Weapons, you say?," *Foreign Policy*, <http://hoffman.foreignpolicy.com>, in reference to an essay by Putin published in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, February 20 2102, and a transcript of a Putin meeting with his cabinet ministers on March 22, 2012.

²⁴⁵ Raymond Zilinskas, "Take Russia to 'task' on bioweapons transparency," *Nature Medicine*, 18:6 (June 2012), p. 850.

²⁴⁶ Milton Leitenberg, "The Biological Weapons Program of the Soviet Union," in *Assessing the Biological Weapons Threat: Russia and Beyond*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Serial no. 113-142, May 7, 2014, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2014.

government agencies, including a statement from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It stated that the US congressional hearing had been a “propagandistic event,” based on “conjecture,” and that those who testified were “representatives of the US establishment.” Only one of the four, David Franz, had ever been employed by the US government. Most importantly, the Russian Foreign Ministry statement said that

...the content of the programme article by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, ‘To be strong: national security guarantees for Russia’, which was published in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* on 17 February 2012, was grossly distorted at the hearings. The part related to scientific and technical achievements and their influence on means and methods of armed fight expressed Russia’s concerns that foreign countries can use such achievements for the creation and use of new types of weapons, in particular, generic [sic] weapons. This thought was ‘turned upside down’ at the hearings in Congress and was presented as Russia’s aspiration to create new types of biological weapons. We decisively reject such considerations as absolutely false.²⁴⁷

The Foreign Ministry statement is ridiculous. In Putin’s long presentation in the Russian press in February 2012 as part of his presidential election campaign and in his TV appearance handing the assigned “tasks” to Russian Defense Minister Serdyukov on March 22, 2012, Putin was certainly not talking about any “other countries.” In addition, in his televised immediate response to Putin, Serdyukov promised that by 2020 the MOD would have completed development of the requested new weapons.²⁴⁸

The congressional hearing prompted several media reports:

²⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the distortion of Russia’s position on BTWC issues by the US Congress,” May 12, 2014, https://www.mid.ru/kommentarii_predstavitelya/-/asset_publisher. See also “Russia Rejects Bioweapons Talk in US Congress as ‘Propaganda,’” Nuclear Threat Initiative, May 13, 2014.

²⁴⁸ Essay by Putin published in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, February 20, 2012 and a transcript of a Putin meeting with his cabinet ministers on March 22, 2012.

- a very good summary in *Time* magazine.²⁴⁹ (An earlier article in *Time* in 2012 had discussed the Putin-Serdyukov exchange which had appeared in the Russian media.²⁵⁰)
- a rather thin summary by the Voice of America, which focused more on the extraneous remarks of various congressional representatives than it did on the Russian BW program,²⁵¹ and
- an RT subsidiary produced a very poor summary of the *Time* article, which additionally introduced several obviously deliberate major errors. Most significantly, it repeated twice that those who testified at the congressional hearings were talking about potential use of biological weapons by Russia. None of those who had testified discussed potential future use of biological weapons by Russia, and there is no such information in the original *Time* magazine article that the RT subsidiary was supposedly quoting directly.²⁵²

Some of the discussion prompted in the Russian media by the Putin-Serdyukov exchanges and responses to it in the West were quite interesting. A competent military analyst, Alexander Khranchikin, Deputy Director of the Institute of Political and Military Analysis, noted in the opening paragraph of a long essay on “new weapons” that “genetic...being a kind of biological weapons, are prohibited by international conventions. The use of such weapons would, in fact, be genocide in the most direct sense of the term.”²⁵³ Khranchikin appears to have conflated the words “gene” and “genocide,” although the two words bear no relation to each other. However, a journalist for *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the same newspaper in which Putin had published his long February 2012 manifesto, wrote in Putin’s defense. He claimed, without presenting any evidence, that Western nations were working on these kinds of weapons and so Russia had to do so as well. However, in regard to “gene” weapons, he provided remarkable information:

Biological weapons are prohibited by international conventions. But experiments in the field of genetic engineering are considered quite acceptable. According to knowledgeable people, the Americans once managed to develop a genetically modified infection, which

²⁴⁹ Alex Rogers, “Lawmakers Mull Biological Weapons Threat from Russia,” *Time*, May 8, 2014.

²⁵⁰ Simon Shuster, “Is Moscow Developing Super Duper Secret Mega Weapons,” *Time*, April 22, 2012.

²⁵¹ Julia Savchenko, “Congressman Ted Poe: ‘Putin is Napoleon of Siberia,’” *Voice of America*, May 8, 2014.

²⁵² “Time: US Congress Puzzled by Russian biological weapons,” InoTV, May 9, 2014. InoTV is a branch of RT, which states “InoTV materials contain estimates of exclusively foreign media and do not reflect the position of RT.”

²⁵³ Alexander Khranchikhin, “Dreams of New Weapons,” *Independent Military Review*, April 6, 2014.

was supposed to cause a dangerous epidemic in the USSR. Humane Yankees, when the infection spread, would provide us with the appropriate vaccine on appropriate conditions.

Huge amounts of money were spent and the deadly strain was prepared for military use. But it turned out that the microscopic content of alcohol in the blood – and genetically modified nonsense did not even cause a runny nose.²⁵⁴

One has to wonder what corner of the Russian government would contrive such incredible nonsense, but a Russian government-controlled newspaper was clearly happy to print it. The most interesting response by the Russian government was a diplomatic one. About a week after the congressional hearing, the Russian Embassy in Washington, DC, contacted the US Department of State and asked to send three members of the Embassy staff to discuss the Putin statements. In a week's time, the three appeared at the Department of State. They first handed over a copy of the Foreign Ministry's previously released press release described above, which was full of errors. They then pointed out their particular irritation with the congressional testimony of Leitenberg for having mentioned the three Russian MOD BW laboratories that have remained closed since 1992, as they had been before 1992. They repeated the lines that have appeared for about 15 years in the Russian rebuttal to the portions of the US noncompliance statements that concern Russia and the BWC: they said that if only the US had agreed to the BWC Verification Protocol in 2001, the US would be able to visit those three MOD laboratories. My congressional testimony was negligent in not pointing out that between 2005 and 2012 foreign visitors other than officials of the World Health Organization were also forbidden entry to all former Biopreparat facilities – which had never been under the formal jurisdiction of the Soviet or the Russian MOD, although those had been open to visits by Western scientists and government officials since the early 1990s. Some partial easing was allowed after 2012 with several visits permitted. The order in 2005 came from Onishchenko, but almost certainly at the direction of officials in Putin's Kremlin administration.

²⁵⁴ Sergey Ptichkin, "Beam Guns on a war wave, Russian armed forces prepare to reflect threats of a new level," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, issue no. 66, March 27, 2012.

When it was the turn for the US Department of State official to speak, he placed the Putin speech and the published transcript of the Serdyukov TV performance before the three Russian diplomats, with the relevant lines marked in both. The three Russians had no comment. They reportedly sat silent. When the US official next mentioned what had transpired in the Trilateral negotiations between the US, UK and Russian delegations in the three years between 1993 and 1996, the three Russian MFA staffers again sat silent. They acted as if they did not know what he was referring to, which may well be possible, or perhaps they were only acting that way. However, the Russian MFA visitors had a last message. They said that Russia would again introduce the subject of a BWC Verification Protocol in some manner at the next BWC meeting.²⁵⁵

Summing up

What is the significance of the preceding narrative, particularly the portion beginning in 2006 during President Putin's regime? The freedom of action and power that President Putin has accorded to the Russian intelligence services since 1999 has surely played a crucial role in this development, and very obviously in the *carte blanche* they have been given to churn out disinformation, including in regard to biological weapons. Does anyone believe the Russian government's BW disinformation and if so, who? Most importantly, do any governments, States-Party to the BWC, or others believe it, as that could have an impact on the BWC. It would seem unlikely, but the answer is unknown for the vast majority of governments. And if it is not believed by these governments, what other significance does the Russian government's persistent BW disinformation effort have?

One can invoke a formulation that Dr. Matthew Meselson frequently used in the late 1960s and that was adopted as a principle during the writing of the set of six SIPRI volumes on Chemical and Biological Warfare published between 1969 and 1973.²⁵⁶ The worst possible event would be a true allegation of biological weapon use by a state. And since 1975, particularly a State Party to

²⁵⁵ Personal communication, early June 2014.

²⁵⁶ *The Problem of Chemical and Biological Warfare*, Volumes 1-6, 1971-1983, Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.

the BWC. The next worst thing is a false allegation of BW use. That is because it explicitly suggests that:

- a State Party is violating the BWC,
- it is doing so and is getting away with it, and
- BW has its utilities, it is a desirable thing to have.

Lentzos has repeatedly invoked Meselson’s dictum. Referring to the dozens of Russian disinformation claims that US BW facilities were located all over the world, or in the Lugar Center in Georgia in particular, Lentzos wrote: “By claiming that biological weapon labs exist where they do not, Russia is hastening the death of that taboo – creating the appearance that reliance on these weapons is greater than it actually is, possibly encouraging other nations to pursue them.”²⁵⁷

When very significant international political actors picked up the Russian disinformation theme that the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen was US biological weapon development – people such as the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, the Indian MP and spokesman for the Congress Party, Manesh Tewari, and Hossein Salami, Commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, followed by the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei – Lentzos bemoaned

that the parade of prominent figures promoting the bioweapons conspiracy theory could weaken the global taboo against possessing bioweapons – making biological weapon research appear to be widespread. ‘It’s being pushed at senior political levels, most prominently from Iran, but also from Russia and to some extents China,’ she said. ‘It’s important we call this out. We can’t afford to have it seem like states have bioweapons and are getting away with it, or even that states would want to pursue these sorts of weapons. It significantly degrades the taboo against biological weapons’.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Filippa Lentzos, “The Russian disinformation attack that poses a biological danger,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 10, 2018, <https://thebulletin.org/2018/11/the-russian-disinformation-attack-that-poses-a-biological-danger/#>.

²⁵⁸ Filippa Lentzos, quoted in Matt Field and John Krzyzaniak, “Why do politicians keep breathing life into the false conspiracy theory that the coronavirus is a biological weapon?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 19, 2020, <https://thebulletin.org/2020/03/why-do-politicians-keep-breathing-life-into-the-false-conspiracy-theory-that-the-coronavirus-is-a-bioweapon/>.

However, the most significant Chinese disinformation initiatives were still to follow Lentzos's publication, and, as already recounted, they were unquestionably a concerted Chinese government initiative.

We have repeatedly asked two key questions. The most important of these is exactly who is it in Putin's administrative hierarchy who orders and directs the Russian BW disinformation campaigns since 2007? The answer to that question unfortunately will require public testimony that so far remains unavailable. The numerous books that have been written about Putin's administration do not examine this subject. However we have noted earlier that Vladimir Surkov in Putin's Kremlin Secretariat was instrumental in organizing the Russian government's disinformation campaigns, including those concerning BW disinformation. The second is to clarify how the hundreds of disinformation stories get concocted. Two bits of testimony have become available that shed at least a little light on this second question. One concerns the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the second the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) office that inherited the functions of the USA Section of the Soviet KGB's First Chief Directorate. The organizational structure of this unit appears to have been modified in the past decade because of the Russian government's additional use of semi-governmental organizations such as Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency (IRA) in Leningrad.

Several years ago, a long-time member of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned in a conversation that as part of his responsibilities he had been asked to provide some narratives that could be used for disinformation.²⁵⁹ He would presumably not have been the only MFA staffer to whom such a request would have been made, but one cannot guess how wide the practice is within the Ministry.

As regards the intelligence services, a single available source is a bit more direct. The *New York Times* produced a film based on their print reporting of the Soviet 1985-1987 AIDS disinformation story. The following exchange appears at the seventh minute of the film:

²⁵⁹ Personal communications, March 6 and March 9, 2020.

Narrator: “Every KGB agent is required to spend 25% of their time coming up with ideas for fake stories. And in a year-end review – yes, the KGB had year-end reviews, too – everyone was evaluated on....”

Ladislav Bittman [former Czechoslovak intelligence agent and diplomat] “...how many proposals for disinformation operations he submitted.”²⁶⁰

It seems more reasonable to assume that Bittman’s testimony would apply to SVR officers serving in the current USA Section and not to “Every [KGB] agent.” The drawback to this information is that it pertains to 1987, and the Soviet era. However, practices in these agencies are very resistant to change, despite the end of the USSR on December 31, 1991, and the subsequent administrations. It is plausible to assume that somewhat similar practices have been followed since Putin took office, especially with the massive increase in Russian government disinformation of all kinds.

Until the Covid-19 disinformation campaign that began in January 2020, the Russian government BW-related disinformation was overwhelmingly directed at its own population and secondarily, through proxy outlets in Georgia, at the pro-Russian portion of the Georgian population. There is no survey or polling information of the Russian population and only a partial one of the Georgian population to tell us what percent of the respective publics accept the fake stories. The false BW information was also released in Armenia, Uzbekistan and Ukraine, as well as by Hamas in the Middle East, and minimally in Africa. Again, we have no idea to what degree the disinformation has made inroads among any of these populations. With the initiation of the 2020 Russian coronavirus disinformation campaign, Russian platforms, particularly Sputnik, have targeted Spanish-speaking Latin America. In addition, Russian platforms distributed a very substantial fraction of their coronavirus disinformation to an Arab-language audience. Given the phenomenal success of the Soviet 1980s AIDS campaign on public opinion across Africa, as well as among the African-American population in the United States,

²⁶⁰ Film documentary: “Meet the KGB Spies Who Invented Fake News: Operation Infektion,” by Barry E. Ellick and Adam Westbrook, November 12, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/10000006210828/russia-disinformation-fake-news.html>.

one should not underestimate the potential degree to which the new wave of Russian government BW-related disinformation in the years after 2007 could be found convincing by more people than one might imagine. Acceptance of disinformation concerning the Ebola outbreaks in Africa over the past 10 years has been widespread, both the kind that is deliberately introduced by a remote actor, and that which appears impromptu in the locally affected media, but statistical survey information is again unavailable (or at least unknown to this author). An epidemiologist who was involved in the Ebola control efforts in Africa wrote: “Sadly, these conspiracies were taken all-too-seriously on the ground in West Africa, hampering public health efforts throughout the outbreak. The stories were often repeated in the local press, and they played into the widespread distrust of government following so many years of civil war in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In some cases, the bogeyman was ‘The Rothschilds’ and other ‘shadowy international bankers who control the US and Europe.’ Last year, these narratives were fringe; today, more and more mainstream.”²⁶¹ The reference to “Rothschilds” and “international bankers who control the US and Europe” is taken from one of the most successful disinformation campaigns ever, the fabricated anti-Semitic “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” Russian Covid disinformation utilized the same theme, replacing “The Rothschilds” with a more contemporary figure, George Soros.

As the well-known aphorism frequently but erroneously attributed to Mark Twain says, “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” The Korean War BW disinformation was likely accepted by a substantial portion of the Soviet, Chinese and East European population in 1951-53, and the Soviet disinformation campaigns in India and Pakistan in the 1970s achieved its aims on their intended targets, the Indian and Pakistani governments. It was probably also reasonably widely accepted by the public in both countries.

A former Pakistan Minister of the Interior, Rehman Malik, released a public letter to the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, on April 5, 2020, in which he asked Guterres to “...order the constitution of a high-powered UN Commission on COVID-19 under [the] UN Convention on Biological Weapons, 1975 to discover whether COVID-19 is man-made or a naturally-grown virus.” Malik said that since virologists had been “unsuccessful in accurately identifying source, locale, genesis, and variable results among affected states, the plausibility of

²⁶¹ Personal communication, October 26, 2019.

some sort of Bio-Warfare within the Fifth Dimension Warfare is gaining root... ‘as the Bio-Warfare theories gain root in societies across the globe, in my considered view, it is essential that a high-powered Commission be constituted to ascertain the actual facts ...’²⁶² Did Malik truly believe what his lines suggest, or was there some other motive for his public statement? No one can say: one only knows that he released the letter.

If other BWC States Party believed the Russian disinformation, it could theoretically prompt some fraction of them to initiate offensive BW programs. Has it had such an effect? We do not know, but it seems unlikely. Do policymakers and defense officials in all BWC States Party understand that all these allegations are lies and fabricated disinformation, even possibly the few (Cuba, Iran, 2-3 others) that give them lip service? Again, we do not know. But assumedly they do not believe the Russian disinformation. Nevertheless, even if false BW allegations haven’t done great damage yet, they certainly are undesirable.

One Russian scientist commented that all of the Russian coronavirus and BW disinformation was of no consequence, he and his academic colleagues paid no attention to it and its significance should not be exaggerated.²⁶³ At the other end of the spectrum, an expert on BW arms control suggested that requesting a meeting of BWC States Party for a meeting under the provisions of the formal consultative mechanism of the BWC might force the nations that disseminate disinformation to end these practices.²⁶⁴ The EUvsDisInfo platform, the Georgian *MythDetector* and the Atlantic Council’s disinformation debunking program certainly indicate that Russian BW disinformation is not a trivial concern. On April 2, 2020, the EU funded a new initiative devoted solely to debunking coronavirus disinformation to be coordinated by a consortium of 11 European non-governmental actors.²⁶⁵

Why does the Russian government carry on the BW disinformation campaigns?

²⁶² “Rehman Malik urges UN chief to investigate coronavirus; Whether coronavirus is man-made,” *The Nation* [Pakistan], April 5, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/05-Apr-2020/rehman-malik-urges-un-chief-to-investigate-coronavirus>.

²⁶³ Personal communications, February 2020.

²⁶⁴ Personal communication, March 18, 2020.

²⁶⁵ <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/news/emergency-funding-track-spread-false-information-about-covid-19>.

- First, to accuse the United States of violating the BWC and of continuing a biological weapon program. This has been the Russian government's response to the annual US noncompliance reports regarding the indeterminate status of the Russian offensive BW program, and it harks back to the 1994-1996 final years of the US-UK-Soviet Trilateral negotiations. This is the purpose of the repeated Russian disinformation claims that the US has 19, 23, 40, 200 or 400 military BW facilities around the world – that is, all sites funded or supported by the DOD/CTR program.
- Second, to attack Georgia, particularly in the years after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the Russian annexation of two segments of Georgia's territory, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- Third to weaken US-Georgian ties in particular, and to weaken US relations with any other CIS state hosting a Nunn-Lugar facility.

Finally, many commentators have suggested that the Russian government carries on their BW disinformation campaigns as a diversion to dilute international attention from:

- the Russian government's assassination first of Litvinenko and then the attempt to do the same with Skripal, both in the UK;
- the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the continued propagation of the war there;
- the Syrian government use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war;
- the Russian government's support of Syrian use of CW at the OPCW and in the United Nations Security Council.

And the final question, what does all the preceding tell us about the Russian government, specifically the Putin administration and its attitude toward the BWC? It is clear that the Russian BW disinformation allegations are all lies. It would be bad enough if a government made such accusations due to a mistaken assessment – that is, not deliberately. That a state makes such false allegations as deliberate disinformation for short-term political gains for 30 years under the USSR and then reinitiated the practice for another 14 years after 2006 by the Russian government up to the present, is unconscionable. There is also a major difference: under Putin: the practice is no longer to plant items in small proprietary communist outlets in third world countries. Now it is the most senior officials in the Russian government who are the ones who deliver the disinformation. In the case of the Lugar Center in Georgia, we now know that nine Russian scientists, several of whom were Russian government scientists, have visited the facility

since 2016, and several of the nine had worked there. It is therefore absolutely certain that the Russian government knows what is being done inside the Lugar Center, that none of it is untoward, and that none of it is a threat to Russia. If anything, quite the opposite in multiple ways: from an epidemiological and disease perspective the Lugar Center in Georgia is a benefit for Russian public health. Armenian health authorities have also taken delegations of Russian scientists and journalists on tours of the Armenian facility converted by the Nunn-Lugar program in attempts to placate Russian government concerns, with no success.²⁶⁶

Nevertheless, in late spring 2020, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs once again released gross disinformation about the Lugar Center. On May 26, 2020, it released a three-page statement about the Lugar Center. Amazingly, the document contained no fewer than 16 false statements, nearly all of them disproved long ago, and many patently ridiculous, such as repeating the disinformation about the Giorgadze patents and claiming that the visit to the Lugar Center by State Parties to the BTWC “had nothing to do with the UN or the BTWC.” The full list of 16 falsehoods are not itemized here as they have been reviewed in previous pages. It is difficult to imagine who in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs could have written a document so full of nonsense. The Russian MFA ended its statement with a demand for a visit by Russian experts with no one else present, including international representatives, for example from the WHO, BTWC or the UN. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia responded the following day,²⁶⁷ which prompted a second Russian MFA statement that added nine new false statements. The Russian government’s BW disinformation program repeatedly displays a brazen disdainful, spit-in-your-eye character.

A month earlier Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, had repeated her more general refrain: “We cannot rule out that the Americans use such reference laboratories in third countries to develop and modify various pathogenic agents, including in military purposes.” She claimed that the Lugar Center was “an official part of the US military system of global infectious diseases control. Moreover, according to recent reports, top-ranking Pentagon officials

²⁶⁶ Giorgi Lomsadze, “Armenia to open doors of US-built biolabs to Russia,” *eurasianet*, October 29, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-to-open-doors-of-us-built-biolabs-to-russia>.

²⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, “Commentary of the Press and Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the statement of the Russian Federation regarding the Lugar Center,” May 27, 2020.

have recently visited it to offer the Georgian authorities to expand the range of research. Naturally we cannot ignore the fact that the Americans are developing an infrastructure with hazardous biological potential in the direct proximity to the Russian borders.”²⁶⁸

In 2020 and 2021 there were also particularly disturbing instances when the most senior representatives of the Russian government pushed their false narrative on the diplomatic level directly to other countries, not just in statements by the Foreign Ministry spokesperson. On September 15, 2020, Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, repeated his typical charges that the US was developing biological weapons while speaking to his colleagues on the Shanghai Cooperative Organization – including China, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and later Tajikistan.²⁶⁹ A similar disturbing event was the report describing the presentations by Patrushev, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and Dr. Anna Popova, Onishchenko’s former deputy and then successor as Russia’s “Chief Sanitary Doctor,” on June 24, 2021 to an international conference on “Biological Security” that was held in Sochi.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the meeting that US-funded bio-medical laboratories operating near Russia’s borders threaten the country and may be behind the current rise in coronavirus cases inside Russia. Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev added that there are now “clear signs that some are trying to use the dangerous pathogens for military-political goals” and that “the rebirth of biological weaponry” is occurring. He called on the international community to focus on “the foreign biological facilities (popularly known as “Lugar Laboratories”) in former Soviet republics. Russian Chief Sanitary Doctor Anna Popova added that the problems that Russia is facing now are directly connected to those laboratories. “We must be ready to repulse” such challenges because they will not be the last case of biological warfare against the Russian Federation. Popova and others suggested in Sochi that the US is developing is bio-warfare capacity abroad because restrictions in the US make it far more difficult for the government to do so at home.

²⁶⁸ TASS, “US labs in third countries may be developing pathogenic agents – diplomat,” April 17, 2020, <https://tass.com/politics/1146327>.

²⁶⁹ “Nikolai Patrushev warned his SCO colleagues about threats from the West,” *Kommersant*, September 15, 2020.

According to Russian officials, the US has established more than 400 laboratories capable of producing pathogens worldwide over the last ten years. Forty of them, Moscow experts say, are located in the former Soviet Union, including Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.²⁷⁰

Early in 2021, Zakharova announced that “Russia is inviting the United States to the negotiating table to discuss US military biological activity near Russian borders.... As long as a verification mechanism within the BTWC framework is absent, it will be impossible to control the rules and degree of involvement of such laboratories in secret research programs of the US Department of Defense. In the meantime, the strains of pathogens of infectious diseases, created by US military biologists, may be used for purposes incompatible with the interests of the national security [of] Russia and other CIS countries.”²⁷¹ Zakharova never mentions that all the “laboratories” she constantly refers to in CIS states are facilities that were part of the former Soviet offensive BW program that were converted to civilian use by the Nunn-Lugar program.²⁷²

In June 2020, a critical new element in the Russian propaganda campaign, a nuclear threat was introduced during a TV series titled “Andromeda Virus” aired on a Russian TV channel, Lenta.ru. It focused on the Nunn-Lugar supported facilities in Kazakhstan and it started innocently enough with familiar repetitions that “outbreaks of fever in the South” had been caused by the facilities, “outbreaks of diseases that strangely coincided with the opening of the new American laboratories,” and that it “conducted scandalous studies of brucellosis, which coincided with the epidemic outbreaks in the region, that the ISTC and the UK had funded

²⁷⁰ Paul Goble, “Moscow Says US Waging Biological War Against Russia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol 18, no. 108, July 8, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-says-us-waging-biological-war-against-russia/> and “COVID-19: All Traces Lead to the United States?,” June 28, 2021, http://www.stoletie.ru/rossiya_i_mir/covid-19?vse_sledy_vedut_v_ssha_749.htm.

²⁷¹ TASS, “Russia urges US to start dialogue on Washington’s military biological activity,” January 15, 2021, <https://tass.com/politics/1245301>.

²⁷² Milton Leitenberg and Raymond A. Zilinskas, *The Soviet Biological Weapons Program: A History*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. See Chapters 22 and 23. See also Paul Stronski, “Ex-Soviet Bioweapons Labs are Fighting COVID-19. Moscow Doesn’t Like It,” Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 25, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/25/ex-soviet-bioweapons-labs-are-fighting-covid-19.-moscow-doesn-t-like-it-pub-82203> and EEAS Special Report Update: Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation around the Covid-19 Pandemic (Update May – November), December 2, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-update-short-assessment-of-narratives-and-disinformation-around-the-covid-19-pandemic-update-may-november/>.

studies of “methods of spreading brucellosis in Tajikistan.”²⁷³ It repeated the themes that the research was secret and controlled by US military officers. It also claimed that “Kazakh President Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev had announced that he was removing military biologists from working in one of the best scientific laboratories in the Republic. The decision was made under pressure from Moscow and Beijing.” However, a Russian report of Tokayev’s public statement does not indicate that he did anything of the sort.²⁷⁴ The Lenta.ru report, however, ended with a striking implicit nuclear threat:

In order to ensure real biosafety in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the SCO and the CSTO more than declarative measures regarding NATO military programs will be required. It’s time to think about a joint and consistent policy. Indeed, if you look, the patronizing attitude to foreign military-biological objects on its territory is tantamount to the deployment of foreign nuclear munitions. It has obvious consequences both for relations with neighbors and for its own security in the event of any military conflict.²⁷⁵

Recall that in 2019, Vladimir Solovyov, the host of another Russian TV program, had suggested that the Russian Air Force should bomb the Nunn-Lugar facilities in Kazakhstan.²⁷⁶

The Russian government’s parallel support of the Syrian government’s use of CW implicitly violates the CWC, at least in spirit if not in material aspects. The policy of continuous false biological weapon allegations diminishes and endangers the BWC. The Russian BW disinformation policy demonstrates an open disdain for the BWC. The Putin administration has little interest in maintaining and safeguarding the integrity of the BWC. It is willing to spend years making hundreds of false allegations regarding biological weapons in order to cloak its

²⁷³ Nikita Mendkovich, “Dangerous Neighbors: The USA opened secret laboratories near the borders of Russia. Why can scary viruses escape from there?,” June 16, 2020.

²⁷⁴ “Tokayev instructed to develop a law on biological safety of Kazakhstan,” Sputnik, May 27, 2020.

²⁷⁵ Nikita Mendkovich, “Dangerous Neighbors: The USA opened secret laboratories near the borders of Russia. Why can scary viruses escape from there?,” June 16, 2020.

²⁷⁶ Kanat Altynbayev, “Pro-Kremlin TV host’s proposed attack against Kazakhstan riles citizens,” Caravanserai, July 5, 2019. See also, Paul Stronski, “Ex-Soviet Bioweapons Labs are Fighting Covid-19. Moscow Doesn’t Like It,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 25, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/06/25/ex-soviet-bioweapons-labs-are-fighting-covid-19.-moscow-doesn-t-like-it-pub-82203>.

own ambiguous compliance with the BWC, and for local political purposes to undermine the Georgian government.

All this bodes ill for BW and CW arms control.

It suggests that Russia has no serious interest in either treaty or their maintenance.

And as in decades past, the false allegations may serve as a cover for a Russian offensive BW program, never abolished or accounted for. There is no direct evidence available to support this fear, but the issue is implicit in each successive US noncompliance statement since the mid-1990s. In addition to the 2013 Putin-Serdyukov statements, Putin's renunciation of the ISTC, CTR, and Nunn-Lugar programs reinforces the same fear.