

# ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE US AND UKRAINE

BRIEF 5 OF 6 | SEPTEMBER 2022



## A CHAIN-OF-LABS NARRATIVE

The first highly visible, contemporary and multichannel disinformation attack on public health labs by Russia targeted the Lugar Center for Public Health Research in Tbilisi, Georgia. The campaign alleged that the United States was establishing a chain of bioweapon labs on Russia’s borders. While this “chain-of-labs” narrative had been simmering for several years, it was in 2018, after British police identified Russian intelligence officers as the culprits of the attempted Novichok assassination of Sergei Skripal, that the campaign significantly ramped up.

A transparency visit in November 2018—where Ukraine invited 22 international experts to the Lugar Centre to visually examine the lab facilities, equipment and activities, access paper documents and electronic records, and interview lab personnel—concluded that: “The facility demonstrated significant transparency about its activities. The visiting team observed nothing that was inconsistent with prophylactic, protective and other peaceful purposes.”

## TIMELINE

4 Sept 2018

British police present Novichok findings and issue arrest warrants for two Russian intelligence officers.

1

11 Sept 2018

British Former Georgian state security minister and Kremlin sympathizer, Igor Giorgadze, calls a press conference where he claims to have uncovered thousands of pages of secret documents indicating the United States may be engaged in illegal medical experiments on people in Georgia and that the Lugar Center may be a cover for bioweapons activities.

2

12 Sept 2018

A Bulgarian national, portraying herself as an investigative journalist, publishes an article that seems to corroborate Giorgadze’s claims.

3

14 Sept 2018

Russian Ministry of Defence Claims the Lugar Center violates the BWC.

4

27 Sept 2018

Georgia responds to Russia’s claims in a note verable circulated to Geneva missions of BWC states party.

5

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**4 Oct 2018**

Claims of bioweapons in Georgia are echoes by the head of the Russian special forces for NBC protection and by the Chair of the Russian parliament's committee on defence.

**10 Oct 2018**

Russia issues a note verable to Geneva mission of BWC states parties.



**12 Oct 2018**

At the UN General Assembly, Syria and Russia make repeated references to a chain of bioweapon labs.

**30 Oct 2018**

Georgia addresses the Russian and Syrian allegations in a prepared statement to the UN General Assembly; Russia attempts to throw doubt on Georgia's transparency initiative in a right-of-reply.



**14-15 Nov 2018**

International experts visit the Lugar Center on invitation from Georgia.

**3 Dec 2018**

Georgia and Germany, and several co-sponsors, publish a working paper to the BWC Meeting of States Parties on the transparency visit.



**4 Dec 2018**

International experts visit the Lugar Center on invitation from Georgia.

**7 Dec 2018**

Georgia publishes a second working paper to the BWC Meeting of States Parties on the transparency visit.



## KEY MESSAGES

While the Georgian and Ukrainian disinformation campaigns make similar claims about American involvement in public health labs and experiments on local people, there are also notable differences.

- ◆ Before invading Ukraine, the Kremlin more actively “pre-positioned” its false narrative through statements to the media, amplifying select tweets, and hacking journalists’ accounts.
- ◆ The campaign targeting Ukraine intensified and adopted a much higher political profile than the Georgian campaign, with President Putin and his senior ministers levelling the charges.
- ◆ Russia’s allegations on Ukraine have been supported by China, most visibly in a joint statement by the Russian and Chinese Foreign Ministers in October 2021 and in the so-called “Beijing manifesto” presented by Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping in advance of the Olympic Winter Games in February 2022.
- ◆ The Ukraine campaign has been supported by far right/conspiracy theorists in the United States, who have provided an immediate echo chamber, enabling the disinformation to spread faster and wider than the Georgian campaign.

## READ MORE

BWC/MSP/2018/WP.5 ‘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, Mali, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, 3 December 2018.

BWC/MSP/2018/WP.11 ‘Transparency visit to the Lugar Center, Georgia: An independent report,’ submitted by Georgia, 7 December 2018.

Lentzos, F ‘The Russian disinformation attack that poses a biological danger,’ The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 19 November 2018.

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