ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE US AND UKRAINE

BRIEF 5 OF 6 | SEPTEMBER 2022

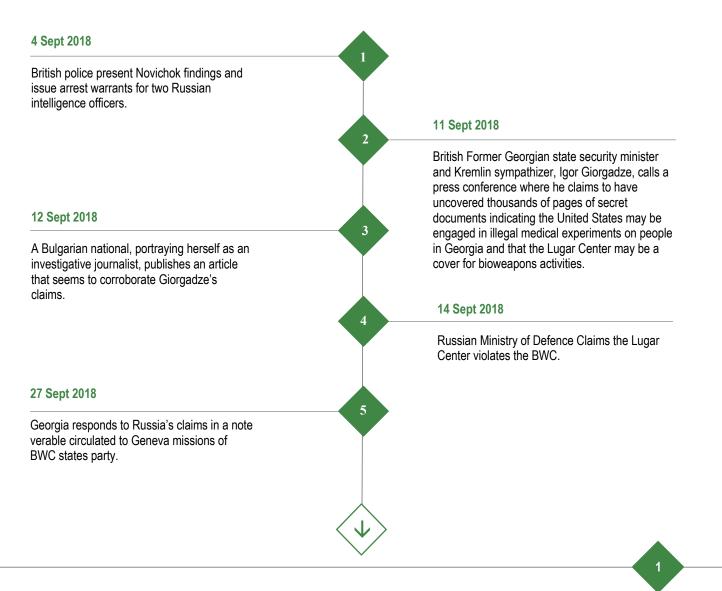


A CHAIN-OF-LABS NARRATIVE

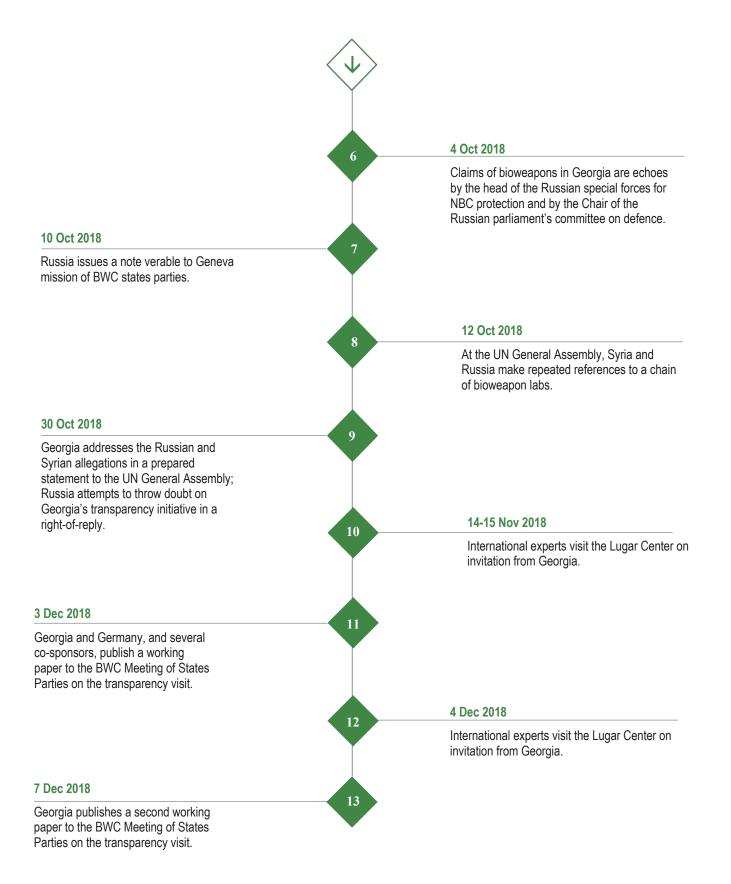
The first highly visible, contemporary and multichannel disinformation attack on public health labs by Russia targeted the Lugar Center for Public Health Research in Tbilisi, Georgia. The campaign alleged that the United States was establishing a chain of bioweapon labs on Russia's borders. While this "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









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.



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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