

BUILDING RESILIENCE TO FALSE NARRATIVES

BWC SIXTH WORKING GROUP ON STRENGTHENING THE BWC
BRIEFING NOTE | AUGUST 2025



CURRENT REALITIES

Erosion of information integrity is a pressing concern in the biological non-proliferation and threat reduction domain. False narratives alleging misuse of biological laboratories in Ukraine and other partner countries around the globe continue to be a key focus.

In the lead up to the August 2025 BWC Working Group session:

- The overarching narrative, which falsely frames peaceful biological research and health security initiatives as covert military bioweapons development, remains largely consistent in Ukraine. However, geographical scope is broadening to encompass regions around the world including Africa, the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.
- The expanding narrative reflects regional specificities. For example, disinformation campaigns targeting Southeast Asia have portrayed biological research facilities which receive foreign funding as fronts for biological weapons development. These narratives often exploit regional tensions over complex strategic rivalries and mistrust towards foreign assistance. New proxy channels, including state-affiliated media and political actors, are being employed to propagate the false claims.

The global expansion of narratives related to biological research, medical counter measures and cooperative threat reduction initiatives reflect a more sophisticated and globalised information manipulation strategy that goes beyond the immediate context of Ukraine. The targeted and deliberate spread of mis- and disinformation undermines broader non-proliferation and threat reduction priorities, including efforts within the BWC to strengthen international cooperation and assistance and to agree new measures on scientific and technological developments relevant to the Convention.

Messaging is generally aligned with anti-‘western’ narratives, where ‘western’ refers not to geography but to liberal democratic values such as freedom of speech, political association and the rule of law. These anti-‘western’ narratives often:

- Frame the BWC as selectively enforced or manipulated by NATO states.
- Portray cooperative bioscience as a neocolonial endeavour.
- Exploit themes of national sovereignty and resistance to external influence to stoke distrust of international cooperation and Western involvement.

UPCOMING SIDE EVENTS

Learn more about recent trends and efforts to build resilience against biological disinformation at two upcoming BWC side events and engage with the Global Partnership Initiative:

1. **Monday 11 Aug 2025, GP Counter Disinformation Initiative side event on ‘Building Resilience to Disinformation Narratives and Tactics’ 1315-1445 in room XXV.** This side event aims to:

- Showcase **country perspectives and experiences** that highlight the need for resilience-building efforts.
 - Provide an **overview of existing tools and approaches** to counter disinformation.
 - Describe **effective approaches to promote resilience** to information manipulation.
 - **Raise awareness** of how policy makers and the diplomatic community can recognize recurring patterns of disinformation campaigns.
 - Increase **partner capacity to build trust and lessen the impact** of information manipulation.
2. **Monday 18 Aug 2025, European Union side event on ‘Safeguarding Information Integrity in the Biological Weapons Convention: 50 Years of Trust, Science and Security’ 13:15-14:45, Room XXV.** This side event aims to:
- **Raise awareness** of how information manipulation affects implementation of the BWC, including trust in Article X cooperation and the S&T review process.
 - **Promote transparency and science-based dialogue** as key safeguards of information integrity.
 - Highlight **practical tools and good practices** to reinforce cooperation, assistance and communication.
 - **Facilitate engagement** between diplomats, scientists, and civil society to explore coordinated approaches to maintain trust and prevent harmful narratives.
 - **Contribute to deliberations** on topics assigned to the Working Group, in particular international cooperation, transparency, and compliance.

RECENT HISTORY BACKGROUNDER

Since the onset of Russia’s war in Ukraine, Russia has made a series of false allegations accusing the United States and Ukraine of conducting prohibited activities in US-supported laboratories in Ukraine. These laboratories conduct peaceful biological activities that promote public and animal health and contribute to regional biosafety and biosecurity. US assistance through the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program is consistent with BWC Article X, which promotes the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials, and information for the peaceful use of biology.

In June 2022, Russia submitted a diplomatic note and Aide Memoire containing questions about the Ukrainian laboratories. The Aide Memoire was largely based on misrepresented, illegible and unsubstantiated materials. Despite a US request for clarification, Russia proceeded to call for a Formal Consultative Meeting under BWC Article V, held on 26 August 2022. At the meeting, the United States and Ukraine provided detailed overviews of their cooperative biological work. 42 other States Parties joined them in dismissing Russia’s allegations as unfounded.

Beyond diplomatic channels, Russia has propagated disinformation about biological weapons through state-sponsored media, proxy outlets and social media channels. These platforms often reference Russia’s claims at the BWC to lend credibility and amplify baseless claims to wider audiences.

Russian disinformation campaigns on biological weapons are not new. Since the early 2000s, Russia has repeatedly targeted peaceful threat reduction initiatives, including programming initiatives, including programming delivered through the Global

Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, an effort Russia participated in until 2014. For example, Russia has long made unfounded claims about the Richard Lugar Center in Georgia, a facility that contributes to public health efforts, including Georgia's COVID-19 response. These recent campaigns are consistent with historical Soviet disinformation tactics aimed at undermining international biological cooperation.

False allegations about biological weapons proliferation are designed to create confusion, accuse others of nefarious acts, distract attention from its own activities and further a narrative of grievance. These include:

- Accusations that States Parties are using Article X of the BWC as a cover for prohibited activities.
- Suggesting that naturally occurring disease outbreaks are the result of biological weapons research.
- Claiming that biological facilities are conducting unethical experiments on human research subjects.
- Mischaracterising research on natural disease vectors or animal hosts as efforts to spread pathogens deliberately.
- The use of Russian-aligned regional media outlets continue to produce multilingual content, primarily available in French, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese.

DISINFORMATION TACTICS

Producers of disinformation often use the following tactics and techniques as part of their malicious efforts:

- **Discrediting opponents** by referencing an opponent's history of colonialism or imperialism; claiming that opponents show a disregard for international rules, procedures, and norms; manipulative referencing of an opponent's historical biological weapons development or use; and framing opponents as corrupt or mercenary.
- **Distortion or creation of false evidence** by inflating the importance of unrelated, inconsequential, or misinterpreted pieces of information to imply nefarious activity.
- **Using sources that appear 'authoritative'** but are misquoted, affiliated with the disinformation purveyor, or lacking in relevance, real credentials or expertise.
- **Appealing to emotions** by exaggerating the risks associated with an opponent's conduct (whether real or falsely alleged); referencing past crises or atrocities and linking them to current events; describing the victims of alleged unethical medical experimentation



MOTIVATIONS FOR SPREADING DISINFORMATION

Disinformation is regularly used by Russia to obfuscate or justify its own actions and undermine adversaries. Common motivations include:

- **Misdirection:** Disinformation targeting Ukraine is being used to distract from activities within Russia such as significant upgrades to its military biological facility

at Sergiev Posad-6.

- **Confusion:** A 'firehose' of disinformation is being used to overwhelm the information space, making it difficult for individuals to distinguish between false and accurate information. This creates an environment where malicious activity can remain undetected.
- **Justification:** Russia has repeatedly used false accusations of biological weapons development in Ukraine, often by NATO allies, and the promotion of false narratives regarding broader WMD threats as justification for its illegal war on Ukraine.
- **Undermining Trust:** Disinformation about bioweapons undermines trust in and support for the rules-based international system, including multilateral disarmament fora.

ACTIONS TO COUNTER BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS DISINFORMATION


There are several actions diplomats can take to counter disinformation campaigns and to prepare for increased information manipulation during the BWC Sixth Meeting of the Working Group. These actions can help delegations build resilience to BW disinformation campaigns and include:


- **Learn about common disinformation tactics, narratives and motivations** in advance of, and during meetings, such as the BWC Sixth Meeting of the Working Group.
- **Share accurate and correct information** and call out attempts to pollute and sidetrack BWC negotiations.
- **Follow the GP Counter WMD Disinformation Initiative** to learn more about the common tactics, narratives and motivations behind biological weapons disinformation.



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