
Formal Consultative 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

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Respective outstanding questions by the Russian Federation to the United States and to Ukraine concerning the fulfilment of their respective obligations under the Convention in the context of the operation of biological laboratories in Ukraine

Additional Statement to the Article V Consultative Meeting Under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, U.S. Special Representative Kenneth D. Ward, September 6, 2022

Submitted by the United States of America

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ambassadors, and Delegates,

1. During this meeting, we have responded directly and openly to the false allegations lodged by the Putin Government in its Article V request. As we have demonstrated, these allegations cannot withstand any scrutiny.
2. Allegations without credible evidence are just allegations. However, in this instance, a State Party has made baseless and false allegations as part of a broader disinformation campaign. As such, it is a blatant abuse of the Article V consultative process and a threat to the integrity of the Biological Weapons Convention.
3. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Kremlin has engaged in a widespread disinformation campaign to leverage lies in its illegitimate war against Ukraine and in its broader confrontation with the West. Indeed, Russia is the world's largest producer and exporter of disinformation.
4. The Putin disinformation playbook is well known to all of us. Its strategy is to deliberately fabricate false claims and false narratives to obfuscate, deceive, confuse, and manipulate – all with the goal of discrediting Russia's perceived enemies, covering up widespread domestic corruption and oppression, and advancing the imperial geopolitical ambitions of the Kremlin.
5. The tactics in the Kremlin's shadow war against the truth are simple. They should all sound familiar to you.

Step 1: Flatly deny everything

6. This is always step one in the Russian disinformation playbook. There are infamous examples: The downing of the commercial airliner MH-17 in Ukraine by a Russian-made missile, the assassination attempts against Sergei Skripal and Alexei Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent, and the cheating scandal at the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. Even when GRU military intelligence agents were caught in the act and deported for attempting to hack into the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Moscow denied any involvement.



Step 2: Unleash a tsunami of false and contradictory narratives

7. The pernicious goal of this Russian tactic has moved beyond just denying or undermining official statements by Western governments. Now it also seeks to flood the media with so many competing versions that nothing seems to make sense. The objective is to make its audience believe that the truth is simply unknowable and, therefore, Russia cannot fairly be blamed or held accountable for anything.

8. In the wake of its attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal with the Soviet nerve agent Novichok, Russia bombarded the world with false narratives, blaming Western governments for the incident and even staging a bizarre RT interview with the two GRU assassins who claimed to be “vacationing” in Salisbury. The Kremlin employed a similar disinformation strategy following its attempted assassination of opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

Step 3: Accuse others of the very transgressions Russia is itself perpetrating

9. The Kremlin has a long history of accusing others of the violations and transgressions which it perpetrates. And it never hesitates to use its diplomatic seat in international organizations such as the United Nations as a platform for spreading disinformation.

10. At the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Russia has accused the United States of staging chemical attacks in Syria and being involved in the development and use of the nerve agent Novichok. These accusations are knowingly false and deliberately intended to deflect culpability. In short, accusing the accuser.

11. The evidence of Russia’s contempt for the Chemical Weapons Convention is clear and compelling. Through a campaign of disinformation and distortion, Russia enabled and protected its Syrian ally while the Assad regime used chemical weapons repeatedly against its own people. In two assassination attempts against its opponents, Putin’s Government has advertised to the world that it illicitly maintains a chemical weapons program and has no compunction about using such outlawed weapons against its adversaries. Just ask Sergei Skripal, his daughter Yulia, Alexei Navalny and the physicians who treated them.

12. Whether or not Russia’s disinformation strategies are effective depends on you and the rest of the international audience. By now, certainly all diplomats should know that the Kremlin has forfeited all credibility in international forums. No one should believe anything that the Russian Government, its officials, or its state media have to say. The Russian Government has amply proven itself to be a calculating and cunning pathological liar.

13. And, here in this forum under Article V, the Russian Federation has accused the United States of collaborating with Ukraine in developing biological weapons in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention. But in fact, it is Russia -- not the United States -- that threatens the world with biological weapons.

14. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States has raised concerns about a continuing offensive biological weapons program in the Russian Federation. This past Spring the United States publicly revealed intelligence indicating that Moscow was prepared to use chemical or biological weapons in a “false-flag” operation against Ukraine.

15. The Russian Federation has never fully acknowledged the massive biological weapons program which it inherited from the Soviet Union. In its request for an Article V consultative meeting, the Putin Government falsely accused the United States of failing to provide an accurate Confidence Building Measure (CBM) submission of our cooperative activities. Yet, it is Russia who in its CBM submission regarding past offensive BW activities never acknowledged the vast biological weapons program of the former Soviet Union.

16. In its Form F CBM submission, the Russian Federation claimed that only research and development was conducted by the Soviet Union and that it was primarily related to biological weapons defense.

17. The Russian CBM submission of its past offensive BW program is an outrageous falsehood and a deliberate attempt to conceal the truth and deceive the world. In fact, after becoming party to the Biological Weapons Convention, the Soviet Union continued to pursue a massive biological weapons program. Ultimately, this program involved more than 30 facilities, including the civilian BIOPREPARAT organization, which was used to conceal the scope of the Soviet BW program. As many as 65,000 scientists, technicians, and other personnel were employed in the research, production, testing, and stockpiling of more than 100 tons of bulk biological weapons agent and filled munitions.

18. The Soviet stockpile contained many tons of anthrax and, while Moscow was ostensibly supporting the international effort to eradicate smallpox, it was prepared to amass tons of the smallpox virus for weapons purposes. Even President Boris Yeltsin publicly admitted that the infamous Sverdlovsk anthrax incident in 1979, killing at least 64, was caused by a containment breach at a facility producing vast quantities of weaponized anthrax bacteria.

19. Yet, the Russian CBM submission brazenly states that “[D]uring the entire period of work no stockpiles of biological weapons were created, thus there were and are no problems related to their destruction.”

20. The United States maintains that the Soviet program was absorbed, not dismantled, by the Russian Federation and that program has continued and evolved in violation of Article I and Article II of the Biological Weapons Convention.

21. Which brings us to the final step in the Putin disinformation playbook.

Step 4: Go back to Step 1 and repeat.

22. This seemingly endless cycle of disinformation emanating from the Kremlin poses a grim threat which goes far beyond the Biological Weapons Convention. Indeed, it has been said that every lie told incurs a debt to the truth. We all have a role in ensuring that this debt is paid; that the lies are vanquished, that truth prevails. The first payment towards that debt to the truth was made by the former counselor of the Russian Mission here in Geneva. In his resignation letter this Spring, Boris Bondarev wrote “Today, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not about diplomacy. It is all about warmongering, lies, and hatred.”

23. In closing, let me make it very clear that Russia’s allegations against the United States and Ukraine are false and deliberately intended to further the Kremlin’s disinformation campaign against the West and its aggression against Ukraine.

24. U.S. cooperative efforts with Ukraine and with other countries today remain fully consistent with the Biological Weapons Convention and in furtherance of our obligations under the international cooperation and assistance provisions of Article X.

25. Despite the continuing confrontation with the Soviet Union and the biological weapons threat it constituted, the United States unilaterally rejected the use of disease as a weapon and joined with the United Kingdom to lead an international effort to legally ban all biological weapons culminating in the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention.

26. We did not renounce these weapons on the condition that others would be prepared to do so. We morally renounced biological weapons and unilaterally ended and destroyed our biological weapons program. That is who we are; that is what we stand for. We are committed to achieving a world without biological weapons.

27. Mr. Chairman, I request that this statement be an Official Document (and Working Paper) of this Article V meeting, and that it be posted by the Implementation Support Unit on the UN Geneva public website.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.