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The Truth About Ukrainian Biolabs

GAI REPORT

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As Russia invaded Ukraine earlier this year, [odd reports](#) began to surface regarding U.S.-led biolabs allegedly operating within Ukrainian borders. In what appeared to be a desperate effort to vindicate the attack on the Ukrainian people, senior Russian officials claimed that the invasion was partly in response to secret biolabs set up throughout Ukraine by the United States.

In March, Russian Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov [declared](#) that the Kremlin had documents proving that Ukraine and the U.S. had been conducting research on deadly pathogens such as [anthrax](#), [African swine fever](#) and [“bat coronaviruses”](#) within the labs. The Russian general also claimed that the excessive number of biological agents housed in these labs, per the documents, indicate that “the work done . . . had been part of some military biological programs.” The Kremlin claims that this work violated the [Biological Weapons Convention \(BWC\) of 1972](#), which prohibits participating nations in producing biological weapons.

Much has been made of the claims, especially in the Western political landscape. [U.S. government agencies](#) and [legacy media outlets](#) quickly denied the existence of the labs, labeling the claim [Russian disinformation](#).

However, in a March 5 Senate Intelligence Committee hearing, [Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland admitted](#) that not only do biolabs exist in the Ukraine but that they do in fact hold dangerous pathogens. She also intimated that if these pathogens were to fall into the hands of Russian troops, they could be used to commit a biological attack on Ukrainian soil.



Nuland's statement created shockwaves in American media as [right-wing pundits seized on the opportunity to slam the Biden administration](#) while left leaning media outlets [insisted](#) the Under Secretary's statements were taken out of context.

So, what is the reality? Has the U.S. been secretly weaponizing deadly pathogens in Ukraine or is this just the latest example of Russian disinformation aimed at making the U.S. look bad?

As is often the case, the truth is far more complicated than the black-and-white narratives that partisans would have you believe. In order to arrive at the truth of these Ukrainian biolabs, one must look back to the start of the post-Cold War era.

Cold War Cleanup

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, [American leaders were concerned](#) that Soviet weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) might fall into the wrong hands. Rogue nations and terrorist organizations posed a grave threat to U.S. national security.

[In November 1991](#), Congress passed a bipartisan amendment from Senators Sam Nunn (D-Ga) and Richard Lugar (R-In) authorizing assistance to former Soviet states in destroying their WMDs as part of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty. This effort came to be known as the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, which is still active today. Since 1998, CTR programs have been administered and managed through the [Defense Threat Reduction Agency \(DTRA\)](#).

As it turned out, dismantling the entire weapon stockpiles and research facilities of the former Soviet Union was [no simple operation](#). U.S. government agencies overseeing the plan had to organize coordinated policies across each agency while navigating through a sensitive geopolitical landscape marred by lingering distrust among former Soviet states.

As the scope and scale of the initiative broadened over time, CTR grew to become a vast bureaucratic program with multiple sub-agencies and an ever-expanding budget.

One of the branches of the CTR program is the [Biological Threat Reduction \(BTR\)](#) program. At the pinnacle of the Soviet regime, Russian biological weapons facilities housed some 60,000 scientists in more than 50 research centers. Soviet scientists reportedly experimented on pathogens that were designed to target plants, animals, and humans.

In the early days of the Nunn-Lugar Initiative, the goal of the BTR program was to dismantle the wide array of Soviet bioweapons facilities and to secure the scientific expertise of Soviet researchers.



Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar leave the White House after advising President George H.W. Bush on Cooperative Threat Reduction.



The War on Biological Terror

After the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the subsequent anthrax attack on U.S. government officials, the Bush administration became increasingly [concerned](#) that terrorist groups might obtain or create biological weapons.ⁱ By 2003, the administration had proposed dramatic increases on biodefense spending including an additional \$6 billion for the development of vaccines and treatments over a ten-year span.ⁱⁱ



Secretary of State Colin Powell describes how a small vial can be used to hold anthrax at the UN Security Council in 2003.

Additionally, Vice President Dick Cheney implemented a crucial change in the chain-of-command that put all biodefense-related research programs under the oversight of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), led by one Anthony Fauci.ⁱⁱⁱ Under Fauci's leadership, the NIAID began to incorporate these programs into the agency's broader scientific research initiatives.^{iv}

As America's biodefense programs were consolidated into one unified whole, biological threats increased internationally with the spread of the 2002 SARS outbreak in China^v and the heightened concern that Saddam Hussein was developing biological weapons in Iraq.^{vi} As a result, the Bush administration began focusing on [biological threat reduction as a tool to mitigate risks of bioterrorism abroad](#).^{vii}

In August 2005, Senators Lugar and Barack Obama traveled to Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan to inspect the destruction sites of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons. During their trip, [Lugar and Obama met with Ukrainian officials to sign a deal on biological threat reduction](#) between the U.S. Department of Defense and Ukraine's Ministry of Health. [The agreement](#) allowed for the U.S. to participate in cooperative biological research and called for the Ministry of Health to consolidate and store dangerous pathogens in secure centralized labs. It also mandated that the ministry hand over all requested copies of dangerous pathogen strains to the DoD for research in U.S. Labs and that all "sensitive," "restricted," or other "state secret[s] of Ukraine" be withheld from public disclosure and made available to the DoD.



Senators Richard Lugar and Barack Obama examine the destruction sites of mobile launch missiles near Perm, Russia as part of their 2005 trip on Cooperative Threat Reduction.



While other former Soviet States had established similar cooperative research partnerships with the U.S., Ukraine had long held out. According to reports, Ukrainian leaders were concerned about how such a partnership may be perceived internationally.^{viii} There were also qualms about the proposed transfer of pathogens to the U.S.^{ix}

Officially, the DoD sought out such research arrangements for “prophylactic, protective and other peaceful purposes” that are in line with the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention.^x However, some have questioned whether the U.S. interest in biological research at this time was solely limited to peaceful aims.

According to a [New York Times article](#) published only a few years [before the Ukrainian negotiations began](#), the United States had been conducting [several secret research projects that straddled the line between biosecurity and biowarfare](#). One project, [codenamed Bacchus](#), was undertaken by the DTRA in 1999-2000.^{xi} That project examined the feasibility of mass-producing anthrax by constructing a mock biowarfare facility. Another, initiated in 1997 called [Project Jefferson](#),^{xii} aimed to create a vaccine resistant strain of anthrax bacteria.^{xiii} During this time, the U.S. also tested the efficacy of using Soviet-style technology to disseminate pathogens through bomblets.^{xiv}

The U.S. government argued that the intent behind these projects was ultimately defensive in nature and therefore compliant with the rules of the BWC.^{xv} However, a number of critics, such as respected [biowarfare expert Jonathan B. Tucker](#), argued the research was clearly outside the scope of international standards.^{xvi}

Predicting Pandemics and Geopolitical Potholes

As President Bush left office in 2008, the focus of the BTR program changed yet again, this time [towards pandemic preparedness and international expansion](#).^{xvii}

During the Obama Administration, the emphasis of biological threat reduction shifted away from destroying pathogens and securing scientific “know-how” to predicting and preventing pandemics by strengthening the U.S.’s global detection and disease surveillance capabilities.^{xviii}



Dr. Nancy Sullivan, Chief of the Biodefense Research Section, shares results of an Ebola vaccine candidate being tested on humans with President Obama during a tour of a lab at the NIH Vaccine Research Center in December 2014. Obama was joined by Anthony Fauci and Health and Human Services Secretary, Sylvia Mathews Burwell.

This was a significant shift in mission, and [by 2012](#), the U.S. had expanded the BTR program to include partners in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.^{xix} The Obama administration also pushed for universities, international organizations, and private sector entities to play a larger role in the BTR program’s pandemic prevention efforts.^{xx}

But these efforts would soon hit a snag as relations began to decline with one of the program’s crucial international partners: Russia.



In the early days of the Obama administration, the White House sought to “reset” [Russian relations](#) by wooing Putin with sweetheart deals like the [Skolkovo Initiative](#), Russia’s partnership with American Big Tech companies to build a silicon valley style hub in Moscow and the [Uranium One deal](#), which transferred nearly 20 percent of the U.S.’s uranium production capacity to a Russian company backed by the Kremlin. These deals, supported mostly by U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, were seen as a way to help Russia diversify its economy and inspire better relations between the two nations. However, when it became clear that [Putin was taking advantage of the arrangements](#) by using them for his own geopolitical and militaristic aspirations, the Obama administration tried to undo the damage by [leveraging its relationship with Ukraine in order to apply pressure to Russia](#). This caused Russo-American relations to [sour](#) even further.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presses a button marked "Reset" alongside Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in 2010

In 2012, [Russia abruptly exited the arrangement with the U.S. on biological threat reduction](#), dealing a massive blow to the DTRA’s goals and [raising questions](#) as to whether the programs in former Soviet states bordering Russia would continue as planned.

But the initiatives under President Obama not only continued, they accelerated.

Coordinating Contractors

Federal funding for biological engagement programs [increased steadily](#), rising from \$174.5 million annually in 2008 to \$320 million annually by 2014. Some of those funds went to [private contractors](#) tasked with constructing new biolabs, renovating outdated facilities, updating infrastructure, and supporting the CTR mission with research projects.

One prominent contractor in Ukraine was a company named Black & Veatch (B&V). That firm had been doing [work for the DoD in Ukraine](#) as early as 2008 and had won a [DTRA contract](#) to build the country’s [first Bio-Safety Level 3 laboratory in Odessa](#) by 2010.^{xxi} In 2012 B&V was awarded [an additional DoD contract](#) to continue performing research on infectious diseases and bio-surveillance in the country. As part of that award, several subcontracts were given to a biotech company called Metabiota.^{xxii}

Metabiota provides disease surveillance and scientific research for government agencies and private companies. According to the [firm’s website](#), Metabiota specializes in the surveillance activities of humans and animals, the training and mentoring of researchers working on biosecurity and disease surveillance, and the scientific research of various diseases.



Sub-Awards ▾

Total Count of Sub-Award Transactions: **115** Total Amount of Sub-Awards: **\$107.15 million** Percent of Prime Award Obligated Amount: **136.9%**

Recipient Name ▾	Action Date ▾	Amount ▾	Description ▾
TRIUNE ENTERPRISES INC	01/05/2015	\$243,108	CLIN 0001 - INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL
METABIOTA, INC.	06/10/2020	\$69,503	SME 1 AND SME 2 MENTORSHIP
METABIOTA, INC.	09/21/2012	\$14,525,531	CONSULTANT LABOR
METABIOTA, INC.	01/17/2013	\$6,287,104	PROVIDE INTEGRATION, PLANNING, ORGANIZATION, M.
MAKROKHIM, PRAT	11/13/2012	\$2,143,922	TECHNICAL/CONCEPTUAL/WORKING
MAKROKHIM, PRAT	11/13/2012	\$2,143,922	TECHNICAL/CONCEPTUAL/WORKING
MAKROKHIM, PRAT	11/13/2012	\$2,143,922	TECHNICAL/CONCEPTUAL/WORKING
MAKROKHIM, PRAT	11/13/2012	\$6,114,803	TECHNICAL/CONCEPTUAL/WORKING
MAKROKHIM, PRAT	11/13/2012	\$6,114,803	TECHNICAL/CONCEPTUAL/WORKING
MAKROKHIM, PRAT	11/13/2012	\$6,114,803	TECHNICAL/CONCEPTUAL/WORKING

Metabiota is listed in Black & Veatch's 2012 defense contract as a recipient of a \$14.5 million subcontract

The Hunter Biden Connection

In 2014, President Joe Biden's son Hunter and his business partners Devon Archer and Chris Heinz (stepson to John Kerry) [led Metabiota's seed and Series A funding rounds through their investment firm Rosemont Seneca Technology Partners \(RSTP\)](#). As a lead investor, Rosemont not only provided Metabiota with capital but also helped the company gain new customers and at one point even offered to sublet its own office in D.C. to the company.



Hunter Biden at the White House Easter Egg Roll event on April 18, 2022

Hunter's involvement in Metabiota's early business deals have led some to believe that the bio company's research in Ukraine has more to do with geopolitics and national defense than scientific study.

According to emails from Hunter Biden's laptop, Hunter and his associates were able to help Metabiota broker a deal with [In-Q-Tel](#), a venture capital firm that operates under the wing of the CIA. In-Q-Tel's stated mission is to accelerate and develop technologies that can be used by the U.S. Intelligence community. Since 2008 the firm has received at [least \\$120 million per year from the CIA, NSA, FBI, and DoD](#).

Emails from the laptop also reveal that Hunter's firm had pitched the idea of a "Science Ukraine" project involving Metabiota and the Ukrainian Gas Company, Burisma, on whose board Hunter Biden served. In an email from Metabiota VP Mary Guttieri entitled "Ukraine Science," Guttieri tells of "how [Metabiota] can potentially leverage our team, networks, and concepts to assert Ukraine's cultural and economic independence from Russia and continued integration into Western Society."



That email troubled some insiders, who note that Hunter’s father, Joe Biden, was in charge of Ukraine policy at the time.

Responding to Russian articles that highlighted this relationship, [Former CIA agent Sam Faddis told reporters](#), “It’s an obvious Russian propaganda attempt to take advantage of this. But it doesn’t change the fact that there does seem to be something that needs to be explored here.”

Metabiota’s Work in Ukraine and China

In Ukraine, Metabiota had been involved in several defense related contracts including the subgrant awarded by Black & Veatch in 2012 (which amounted to over \$14.5 million). The B&V subcontract was for consultation services in Ukraine, but at the time, Metabiota had also been receiving funds from the DTRA for [other defense related contracts](#) including research on the Ebola virus, which rose to prominence two years later in Western Africa.

In 2014, the company was awarded an [\\$18.4 million contract](#) from the DTRA for Research and Development in the area of “Physical, Engineering, and Life Sciences” relating to “International Affairs and Cooperation.” A portion of those funds went towards “Ukraine Research Projects.”

Although the details of that project remain murky, a [leaked 2014 pitch deck memo](#) from Rosemont Seneca shows that Metabiota had received a DTRA contract to “implement a research project in Ukraine aimed at understanding the threat of tularemia and anthrax.”

That same year, the company was listed as a participant in the USAID’s Emerging Pandemic Threats PREDICT program. That program, [which was created in 2009](#) and partially [absorbed by the DTRA and NIH in 2019](#), aimed to predict pandemics by discovering new viruses in the wild and studying whether or not they may be capable of infecting humans. [Other partners/participants of the PREDICT program](#) included the U.S. Center for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, UC Davis, UC San Francisco, EcoHealth Alliance, and China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology.



Chinese officials stand outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where some scientists believe COVID-19 originated



The PREDICT program eventually evolved into the Global Virome Project, which still operates today. [Led by Metabiota Chief Scientific Officer Edward Rubin](#), the GVP [launched in February of 2018](#) as U.S. government funding for PREDICT came to an end. While the GVP was technically its own project, the research goals of the GVP were virtually identical to that of Project PREDICT, having been [created out of a framework](#) designed by EcoHealth's Peter Daszak and Metabiota's founder, Nathan Wolfe.^{xxiii}

But Global Virome Project partners were not just simply collecting viruses found in the wild. [They were altering these viruses](#) to make them more infectious to humans through a controversial new research method called [Gain-of-Function](#).

In order to determine whether or not deadly animal viruses could be contagious to humans, researchers used gene editing technology to combine the animal viruses with human viruses. In some cases, these chimeric viruses, as they are called, were [given enhanced functions](#) that enabled them to spread efficiently from animals to humans.

In March of 2018, EcoHealth Alliance, the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and other members of the GVP submitted a [joint proposal](#) to the Pentagon's research funding agency, DARPA. In the proposal, researchers laid out their plans to perform gain-of-function experiments on a highly contagious SARS-related bat coronavirus in China.

Ultimately, DARPA rejected the proposal, citing concerns that the research would likely involve gain-of-function experiments. DARPA also noted that EcoHealth and the other GVP partners had failed to address ethical, legal, and social concerns associated with the research. But the DARPA rejection did not stop the GVP from conducting the experiments.^{xxiv}

According to a [recent letter to Congress](#) from acting NIH director Lawrence Tabak, EcoHealth Alliance had conducted gain-of-function experiments in 2018^{xxv} on the very same pathogens listed in the DARPA proposal.^{xxvi} These experiments, which were conducted at the Wuhan lab from 2018-2019, were administered by Anthony Fauci's NIAID as part of a grant called "Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence."^{xxvii}

One year later, a virus, [strikingly similar](#) to the one described in the GVP proposal to DARPA, began to spread in the city of Wuhan, China. What started as a local outbreak, would rapidly develop into the global COVID-19 pandemic that has killed over six million people worldwide.

While initial theories of the origin of COVID-19 centered on a natural origin, [many experts now believe that the virus emerged from a lab](#). They argue, among other points, that the close proximity of the outbreak to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where EcoHealth Alliance and Metabiota had been working on SARS related bat coronaviruses, serves as a damning piece of evidence.

So what does all of this have to do with biolabs in Ukraine?



The Truth About Ukrainian Biolabs

In judging the veracity of Russian claims that the U.S. has been running a secret bioweapons program within Ukrainian labs, American media outlets have failed to provide the full historical context of the U.S. Defense Department's Biological programs in former Soviet states. When factored into the equation, the history paints a different picture from that which has been presented to the American people.



U.S. Army officers from the Aberdeen Proving Ground and Fort Detrick observe as Ukraine Ministry of Defense soldiers perform tests on biological pathogens during a training exercise in Kyiv, Ukraine.

First, there are in fact biolabs in Ukraine. Scientists at these labs have been studying dangerous pathogens with funding from the U.S. Defense Department for many years. However, it is not clear whether or not the research performed in those labs was in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972, as the Russians have claimed. While those assertions were denied by the U.S., there are troubling aspects of past and current U.S. programs overseeing some projects involving biodefense research. Additionally, the proliferation of dangerous research methods such as Gain-of-Function indicates, at the very least, a concern that American leaders have failed to properly confront the ethical and legal concerns associated with such research practices.

Lastly, it is true that at least one of the military contractors working on dangerous pathogens in Ukraine was financially connected to the son of America's current president, Joe Biden. Hunter Biden's firm helped biotech company, Metabiota secure investments and contracts from multiple government entities connected to the U.S.'s defense and intelligence agencies. That organization would later partner with a group of researchers who were performing risky experiments on bat coronaviruses in Wuhan, China, where COVID-19 first spread in 2020.



While it is evident that the Kremlin is using these inconvenient truths to distract from other factors that most certainly do not justify the invasion of Ukraine, there does seem to be, at the very least, valid reasons for Americans to question the underlying goals and long-term impacts of programs like the DTRA that operate in Ukraine and China.

Given the history of such programs, it may not be so far-fetched that some remain skeptical of the research goals underlying the work being done in Ukrainian biolabs.

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- ⁱhttps://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Policies_of_the_Bush_Administration.pdf
- ⁱⁱ<https://unherd.com/2022/08/how-dick-chenev-created-anthony-fauci/>
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- ^{vii}<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/12583/chapter/5> (see page 36 of the report/pg. 17 of pdf)
- <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R43143.pdf> (see paragraph 1 under “International Cooperation- The G-8 Global Partnership” on page 18 of the report/pg. 23 of pdf)
- ^{viii} <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-08-30-0508300130-story.html> (See page 4 of pdf)
- ^{ix}<https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1519360&crd=f5b42c47-c926-4005-952b-a28614eacba8&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A4FB8-K4W0-TWTC-61RG-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=282801&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecomp=rbzyk&earg=sr0&prid=909ec4f9-01c6-4823-8e2a-1dd7b1b46170>
- ^x (See sentence 1 under Section 5 of Article IV of [the Agreement](#))
- ^{xi} <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn1449-anthrax-in-florida-and-new-york-the-same-strain/>)
- ^{xii} <https://sgp.fas.org/news/2001/09/dod090401.html>
- ^{xiii} <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004-10/features/biological-threat-assessment-cure-worse-disease>
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- ^{xix}<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557949/> (See page 29 of report/pg. 54 of pdf)
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- <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R43143.pdf> (See paragraph 2 of “Cooperative Biological Engagement” on page 37 of report/pg. 42 of document)
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