



Inside Russia: Spreading Virus Disinformation Narratives

OE Watch Commentary: In Russia, as in many other countries, COVID-19 has exposed weaknesses within the country's medical system. The Kremlin's optimistic forecasts from a few months ago have been replaced with sobering statistics, frantic construction of new medical facilities, and continued social restriction measures. As the country continues to struggle in stopping the spread of the virus and addressing its economic consequences, the perennial question as to "Who is guilty?" (кто виноват?) has surfaced. Not surprisingly, as the title of the accompanying article from the popular daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda* insinuates ("Does the US surround Russia with secret bio labs in order to infect us with a new virus?"), it is clear which country many Russians find most responsible.

The article begins by describing how "around... Russian borders, 33 US medical centers are concentrated, where secret biological developments are underway." These laboratories, which were developed after the end of the Cold War to assist the former Soviet republics with their health needs, have now been transformed by articles like this into the primary perpetrator of any disease. Filled with innuendo and conspiratorial analysis, the article attributes every infectious outbreak over the past 20 years in this region to these US labs, going so far as to suggest that by maintaining labs in countries around Russia, the US will be able to infect Russia via "migrant workers." It includes comments from an alleged "expert," who implies that pandemics are part of US strategy, asserting that "viruses will be used to destabilize the country, undermine its economy and change power. This is how the idea and technology of the 'color revolutions' was successfully used."

This article is not an outlier, but rather represents a central theme in the many faceted Kremlin campaign to both divert criticism of its own performance and to "prove" once again that the US will stop at nothing to weaken Russia. A vaccine for COVID-19 will ultimately be developed, but as this article indicates, it may take much longer to reverse anti-American sentiments in Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Around... Russian borders, 33 US medical centers are concentrated, where secret biological developments are underway...”

Source: Dmitry Steshin, "США окружают Россию секретными биологическими лабораториями, чтобы забросить нам новый вирус? (Does the US surround Russia with secret bio labs in order to infect us with a new virus?)," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27126/4208473/>

...Around the Russian borders, 33 US medical centers are concentrated, where secret biological developments are underway

...Indeed, after the collapse of the USSR, such laboratories began to grow in the newly formed republics, like mushrooms. What they were doing was of little interest until the terrible documents about research in a similar US laboratory near Tbilisi fell into the hands of the former Minister of State Security of Georgia.... Now, Igor Giorgadze lives in Russia as a political refugee.... According to him, the Americans began to agree on the creation of a biolaboratory in Georgia under Shevardnadze, in the early 2000s. And they built and opened a strange laboratory, the activity of which was able to activate, under Saakashvili, in 2003-11....

In 2018, Giorgadze passed creepy documents from this laboratory. For example, a register of deaths during research. December 2015 - 30 dead in a month, 24 people died in one day. April 2016 - 30 dead, August - 16 dead. In the column "cause of death" - "not established". Surnames of the dead are unknown - medical secret. Some kind of "factory of death" ...

...Of course, Giorgadze made this information public. And then a scandal also began. But scandals in today's world do not live long, everyone forgot about this story. But two years later, there was a worldwide pandemic of the still unexplored virus. Therefore, the KP special correspondent contacted the ex-Minister of State Security of Georgia....

- Igor Panteleimonovich, was there any official and political reaction to your investigation? Inside Georgia, in the West, in Russia?

"...By strange coincidence, it is from these countries that the main stream of migrant workers goes to Russia.... With such a density of biological centers monitoring safety, Uzbekistan has experienced several strange epidemics since 2011, and the diseases remain unknown..."

"...And the concern of Ukrainian opposition deputies, who noticed strange laboratories, was caused not only by the current coronavirus pandemic, but also by local outbreaks of incomprehensible diseases of recent years. For example, in 2016, immediately 20 Ukrainian troops died from a virus similar to the flu. Another 200 people were hospitalized...."

It is easy to guess why the US biolaboratory is clinging to the borders of Russia. They need local material for research. But why? Really, someone in their right mind is able to start a biological war? Logic says yes. Total, unlikely, but local - completely. And I asked Igor Giorgadze a question that tormented me, which there was especially no one to ask:

- Is there any common sense in the assumption that this belt of laboratories is preparation for a war that will take place in unprecedented, previously unknown forms?

"...Viruses will be used to destabilize the country, undermine its economy and change power. This is how the idea and technology of the "color revolutions" was successfully used. The state did not seem to collapse, but the power changed radically ..."

"I believe that the Third World War began immediately after the Second," Giorgadze replied. - In 1991, the first goal of the Third World War was achieved, they destroyed the USSR, they celebrated the victory. But the war continues, only against Russia. And this war is changing its form. Analyzing today's events, I note that even if the spread of this virus was not specifically planned, it turned out to be realistic to use the pandemic in their tactical and strategic plans.... Therefore, we can consider the pandemic as one of the scenarios of the Third World War, a prologue or rehearsal - this version cannot be discarded...."