



## The Russian Narrative of US Biological Weapons Research in the CIS

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted articles discuss Russian conspiracy theories about foreign funded human genome and pathogen research in the former Soviet Union. These theories are not just being discussed in the blogosphere, but appearing in the mainstream news sources. President Vladimir Putin has even mentioned the issue: “Do you know that biological material is being collected all over the country, from different ethnic groups and people living in different geographical regions of the Russian Federation? The question is – why is it being done? It’s being done purposefully and professionally...”

In general, most concerns relate to the activities of The International Science and Technology Center (ISTC), an organization established by an international agreement in 1992 to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The treaty was signed during the economic chaos resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The intent of the treaty was to ensure that WMD scientists from former Soviet republics did not proliferate WMD technologies by finding employment with other nations or terrorist groups. In order to prevent this proliferation, certain ‘donor’ states would fund programs for ‘recipient’ states in the former Soviet Union. WMD scientists from the former Soviet Union would work foreign sponsored projects, such as basic and applied research. The ISTC donors are: Canada, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Norway and South Korea, while the ISTC recipients are: Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan.

The accompanying articles from *Krasnaya Zvezda* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* lay out a Russian (conspiratorial) view of the ISTC activities in the former Soviet Union. There are several accusations made regarding research on the human genome and dangerous pathogens. The first is that dangerous pathogens are being studied so they could possibly be weaponized at some point in the future. In a similar vein of thinking, a theory is also promoted that the US wants dangerous pathogen development to be conducted on foreign shores to lessen risk to the US population. Perhaps the most interesting theory is discussed in the article from *RT*. It suggests that the US may be attempting to create a genetic weapon to target ethnic Russians, based upon a US Air Force contract tender. Although even these Russian sources make it clear that the creation of such a weapon is far-fetched, the Russians are still quite skeptical about the intent of the research. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

**Source:** Oleg Vladykin, “Бактериологические мины заложены во всех странах СНГ: Дядя Сэм знает, какой «вершок» или «корешок» полезнее ему [Bacteriological Mines Are Being Planted in the CIS Countries],” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 26 January 2018. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/syria/item/35868-bakteriologicheskie-miny-zalozheny-vo-vsekh-stranakh-sng>

*A system of American biological espionage is operating in the post-Soviet space. The head office of an intergovernmental organization with which Russia terminated its collaboration some years back in view of the manifest threat to our national security moved out of Moscow relatively recently. It is now relocating in Astana, Kazakhstan. This is a reference to the International Scientific and Technical Center (ISTC) established in 1994 ostensibly to monitor the WMD nonproliferation regime. But as has become clear over time, this center may make the entire population of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) into guinea pigs for the testing of new types of American bacteriological weapons. In the early 1990s, taking advantage of the “chaos in the heads” of the Russian elites, as well as the support of pro-Western politicians, the United States was able to impose on Russian colleagues its own perception of the problem of the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. To this end the US State Department mounted an information attack aimed both at “brainwashing” the post-Soviet public and intimidating the average Westerner...*

*The interest of the ISTC’s employees -- or, more precisely, State Department staffers -- extends to the following research projects being conducted with their oversight: environmental security issues; the creation of new vaccines, medicines, and pharmaceutical products; fundamental research on the given topic, infectious pathology, and so forth. And of course, the classic genre is that of combating bioterrorism, projects on which are included in the scientific research plans of all the recipient countries among the former USSR republics without exception. In essence, the program to combat bioterrorism being implemented within the ISTC framework embraces an extensive range of diverse research studies...*

*...The support for scientific projects in the former union republics on the part of the aforesaid organization, behind which lurks the United States, is doubly significant in the strategic perspective. First, this is a unique kind of political instrument for the introduction of American influence in the post-Soviet space via the formation of “Uncle Sam”-dependent scientific centers in the republics of the former USSR. With the aid of partial funding and assistance in technically reequipping the scientific institutions and finding internships for their employees in the United States and its satellite countries. Second, this enables the donor countries to evaluate the “breakthrough” quality of any given scientific field from the standpoint of prospective feasibility, and this will allow them to substantially relieve the expenditure side of the budget being allocated to the needs of their own science...*

*There is yet another facet to the ISTC’s activity that is unseen at first glance. The implementation of an entire range of programs, primarily in the context of combating bioterrorism, requires the performance of microbiological research involving the pathogens of particularly dangerous infectious diseases...by shifting the performance of research involving dangerous microorganisms onto someone else’s shoulders (outside the United States), the Americans are reducing their own risks on this score to a minimum. But this is not all, either. The investigations in question have a dual subtext, as it were. On the one hand, a study is being made by experimental means of the particularly dangerous causative agents of epidemics with the aim of their effective neutralization; on the other hand, efforts are being made for the subsequent identification by the laboratory method of particular cultures of microorganisms with unusual biological properties that would be entirely suitable for the development of a new generation of bacteriological weapons... the pinpointed regional peculiarities give Washington and its allies the capability as and when necessary to conduct an act of biological sabotage, disguising it as the activation of natural seats of “local” infections.*

*(continued)*



## Continued: The Russian Narrative of US Biological Weapons Research in the CIS

*“Do you know that biological material is being collected all over the country, from different ethnic groups and people living in different geographical regions of the Russian Federation? The question is – why is it being done? It’s being done purposefully and professionally...”*

*-Russian President Vladimir Putin*

**Source:** Andrey Vaganov, “За Родину, за русский геном! Версия для печати: Биоматериалы из России вряд ли используются для создания этнического оружия, но четкий контроль в этой сфере необходим, [For the Motherland, For The Russian Genome: Biomaterials from Russia Are Unlikely To Be Used To Create Ethnic Weapons, But Strict Control in This Sphere Is Essential],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 1 November 2017. [http://www.ng.ru/kartblansh/2017-11-01/100\\_7108\\_kart.html](http://www.ng.ru/kartblansh/2017-11-01/100_7108_kart.html)

*...in 1989 the USSR joined the world Human Genome program... Several Russian military experts have long been asserting that the Human Genome program is only the tip of what is in fact a military iceberg. And they claim that this program is aimed not so much at decoding the genome as at collecting biological material, including various pathogens and other unusual biological specimens. However, access to the banks of collected biodata is strictly restricted. Specialized laboratories have been created with the Americans’ aid in virtually all countries surrounding Russia: Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan...*

*Once again it is no accident that on 1 November Sergey Ryabov, Russian Federation deputy foreign minister, stated that “the threat of the use of biological weapons by state and nonstate entities cannot be discounted. Especially since this use could be disguised as natural outbreaks of infectious diseases among people, animals, or plants.” And all this ties in with Vladimir Putin’s statement.*

*...in addition there is also a commercial component to this whole story to do with the export of biomaterials from the Russian Federation. The point is that organizations outside Russian Federation territory which export biological specimens abroad are outside the Russian taxation system and do not pay taxes in Russia, unlike Russian laboratories. The majority of serious experts who have had time to comment on Vladimir Putin’s statement are inclined to believe that “it is scarcely likely that these specimens are being used in some additional way. Although, following the specimens’ export, foreign companies do not come under Russian legislation and it is impossible to effect any control over the use of specimens and of the data that has been obtained.” Still, though: Can the data from, for instance, the Human Genome project be used or not to create genetic weapons which selectively destroy representatives of a particular race or ethnicity?...*

**Source:** “Russian biological samples ‘collected for research’ – US Air Force,” *RT Online*, 1 November 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/408416-russians-biological-samples-research/>

*The choice of the Russian population for genetic material was not intentional, and is related to research on the musculoskeletal system, the US Air Education and Training Command (AETC) spokesman said. Eyebrows were first raised in July when the AETC issued a tender seeking to acquire samples of ribonucleic acid (RNA) and synovial fluid from Russians. It announced that all samples... “shall be collected from Russia and must be Caucasian.” The Air Force noted that it would not consider tissue samples from Ukraine, for reasons not explained... According to AETC spokesman...the 59th medical group’s molecular research center is currently conducting “locomotor studies to identify various biomarkers associated with trauma.”*

*Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that Russian genetic material is being harvested all over the country. “Do you know that biological material is being collected all over the country, from different ethnic groups and people living in different geographical regions of the Russian Federation? The question is – why is it being done? It’s being done purposefully and professionally. We are a kind of object of great interest,” Putin told Russia’s Human Rights Council, without specifying who might be behind the activities involving Russians’ biological samples. “Let them do what they want, and we must do what we must,” he said. The fact that Russian tissue samples specifically are on the wanted list made some wonder whether the Pentagon is working on a biological weapon to target Russians...*

*Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed on Tuesday that Russian special services are in possession of intelligence suggesting that NGOs are collecting genetic material from the population. “Some emissaries are really carrying out such activities, representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other bodies. Such cases were registered, and security services, the president naturally have this information,” he said.*

*This is not the first attempt to collect samples of Russian genetic material by foreign agencies in Russia, Igor Nikulin, a former member of the UN biological weapons commission, told RT. “Such attempts were made back in the 90s, when there was a Human Genome program, then there were various programs in the 2000s too... under different pretexts, including the most noble, but for some reason all this happens in the interests of the US military department, and this raises suspicion,” Nikulin said...*