



Ukraine's biolabs riddled with corruption and neglect – Russia

Description

USA: The network of US-sponsored biolabs in Ukraine has been suffering from safety issues and rampant corruption, Moscow claims

Moscow has claimed that Ukraine's sprawling network of secret biological labs has been plagued with critical safety flaws, while funds allocated to fix the issues have been consistently disappearing.

Multiple laboratories were simply not fit to handle the hazardous materials and pathogens they have been working with, Chief of Russia's Radioactive, Chemical, and Biological Protection Forces Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov said during a briefing on Friday.

"According to official data, only three laboratories with a BSL-3 biological safety level have had the right to perform such studies. These are the Odessa Anti-Plague Institute, the Institute of Epidemiology and Hygiene in Lvov, and the Public Health Center in Kiev," Kirillov stated.

Even the facilities that were supposed to meet the biosafety requirements were riddled with assorted issues, the official said, citing a report by the Ministry of Health of Ukraine. The ministry allegedly uncovered multiple violations at the Anti-Plague Institute, including the improper containment of pathogens, faulty ventilation, and a lack of control over access to hazardous materials. The institute has had a large collection of some 654 pathogens, including anthrax, cholera, and other infectious diseases, Kirillov added.

The subpar safety standards have resulted in multiple accidents at the facility, documents obtained by the Russian military suggest. Back in 2017, for instance, laboratory employees reportedly contracted tick-borne encephalitis at their workplace. In 2021, an employee of the institute was seen freely taking test tubes with hazardous materials off of the institute's premises, Kirillov stated.

Attempts to improve the biolabs' safety have been hampered by rampant corruption, the official claimed, citing a report by the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU). According to the document, the US-

based engineering company Black & Veatch spent some 37.8 million hryvnia (some \$4.7 million at the time) to upgrade three “*veterinarian laboratories*” back in 2013.

“According to an independent evaluation, the actual work cost some 17.7 million hryvnia less compared to the declared value,” Kirillov said, adding that the data obtained by the Russian military suggests that the funds had been funneled to several shell companies and vanished “*benefiting American and Ukrainian officials.*”

Another corruption scheme involved a laboratory located in the Kharkov region, Kirillov went on. The “*American curators*” urged Kiev to improve the biosafety level of the facility, but a local company tasked with planning this project said it was impossible.

“Still, the local administration decided to continue the refurbishment. The object was launched in circumvention of biosafety norms and regulations,” the official said. “*The total cost of [the facility’s] modernization for the Pentagon amounted to some \$15 million,*” Kirillov went on, adding that what exactly the funding was spent on was “*unknown.*”

“The neglect in handling pathogens, lack of professionalism and corruption in the executive branch, as well as the destructive influence of American curators pose a direct threat to the civilian population of Ukraine and European countries,” Kirillov concluded.

Russia began publishing evidence it had managed to obtain on the sprawling network of US-funded biolabs scattered across Ukraine shortly after launching a large-scale military operation in the neighboring country in late February. The secret installations have allegedly been involved in questionable research and the alleged development of biological weaponry.

US officials have previously confirmed the existence of “*biological research facilities*” in Ukraine, but said Washington only provided what they called “*assistance*” for efforts that did not involve the development of bioweapons.

Russia attacked the neighboring state, following Ukraine’s failure to implement the terms of the Minsk agreements, first signed in 2014. The German- and French-brokered protocols were designed to give the breakaway regions special status within the Ukrainian state.

The Kremlin has since demanded that Ukraine officially declare itself a neutral country that will never join the US-led NATO military bloc. Kiev insists the Russian offensive was completely unprovoked and has denied claims it was planning to retake the two republics by force.

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