

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

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ambassadors, and Delegates,

At the outset, 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. U.S. cooperative efforts with Ukraine and with other countries have always been fully consistent with the Biological Weapons Convention and, in particular, support the implementation of our obligations under the international cooperation and assistance provisions of Article X.

During this meeting, Ukraine and the United States will jointly present the facts about our cooperation and discredit the false allegations and statements made by the Russian Federation. We will expose the campaign of disinformation being perpetrated by Putin's Government.

Ukraine and the United States take our BWC obligations seriously and our participation in this consultative meeting is a reaffirmation of our respect and support for the BWC and its Article V. We consider the consultative process established by the Second and Third Review Conferences to be an important mechanism for addressing concerns among States Parties. However, Russia's actions are politically motivated – intended to advance its baseless allegations as part of a broader disinformation campaign – and thus an abuse of the Article V process.

It should be remembered by all States Parties that the United States made the decision in 1969, over fifty years ago, to terminate and destroy its biological weapons program. Despite the continuing confrontation with the Soviet Union and the biological weapons threat it posed, 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.

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 remain committed to achieving a world without biological weapons.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

The story of why we are regrettably in this room today begins several decades ago. That historical context is necessary to fully understand the motivations underpinning the Russian Federation's decades of disinformation about the United States, about Ukraine, and about the West, and its invocation today of a consultative meeting under Article V of the Convention.

There is a pointed and unmistakable irony to Russia's allegations about our cooperation and assistance efforts in Ukraine. For two decades, Russia was very willing to take advantage of similar cooperation and assistance from the United States. Beginning in 1992, the United States

provided capabilities and expertise to help Russia with WMD threat reduction efforts to address the serious proliferation concerns related to the collapse of the Soviet Union. For many years, pursuant to a bilateral agreement, we collaborated with Russia on biological research and biosafety and biosecurity programs that were similar to those that Russia is now criticizing. The Russian government repeatedly approved and cooperated with the United States on biological research projects on the very same topics as in other Former Soviet Union countries. Now, Russia is alleging that such cooperation is sinister evidence of a U.S. offensive BW program.

Unfortunately, everything changed in 2013. Russia refused to extend its cooperative threat reduction agreement with the U.S. Department of Defense, demanding a new agreement. While the United States repeatedly sought to negotiate an agreement that would satisfy the Russian Federation, the Russian government clearly had taken a political decision to curtail its biological cooperation with the United States. Alleging subversive activities, Russia also expelled the U.S. Agency for International Development, which was working on issues such as human rights, civil society, and public health. Russia proclaimed that it was more than capable of funding its own security and nonproliferation efforts, and that it no longer needed the United States.

Not satisfied with merely ceasing its peaceful cooperation with the United States, Russia then sought to disrupt our ongoing cooperation with its neighbors. It tried to sow division and discord between the West and what it still perceives as its neighboring vassal states. It has conducted this disinformation campaign against the U.S. Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (DoD CTR) for over a decade. It leveled baseless allegations against the Lugar Center in the Republic of Georgia and escalated its claims about DoD CTR and other U.S. Government programs following its unlawful invasion and seizure of Crimea in 2014. Due to those illegal actions, the United States suspended what little cooperation remained with Russia.

In the ensuing years, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) alleged the United States was establishing laboratories with biological warfare capabilities in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Moscow also spread the very same lies you have been told, including that through U.S. support for foreign biological laboratories, the United States was pursuing a biological weapons program in violation of the BWC.

During the years that followed, the disinformation drumbeat from the Kremlin on this issue steadily escalated. In 2017, Foreign Minister Lavrov voiced concerns about U.S. cooperative biological research in countries neighboring Russia. In 2018, the Russian Foreign Ministry falsely alleged that the Lugar Center was conducting human subject research on Georgians, studying mosquitoes for potentially spreading malaria as a method of warfare, and was responsible for disease outbreaks in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. The Lugar Center has disproven these wild accusations on multiple occasions, has published joint research openly and transparently, and has repeatedly opened its doors to visitors.

Most recently, disinformation about U.S. cooperation with Ukrainian biological laboratories was also folded into the now infamous firehose of falsehoods put forth by the Kremlin justifying its invasion of Ukraine in February.

On March 16th, President Putin claimed that “components of biological weapons were being created in direct proximity to Russia on the territory of Ukraine” and asserted “we were forced to begin this special military operation.”

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67996>

On May 13th, Russia’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia, echoed these claims in a statement to the UN Security Council, and I quote him:

“We keep receiving very worrisome documental evidence that the US Department of Defense is directly involved in implementing in [Ukraine] dangerous biological projects that have characteristic features of a secret military biological program. This activity was undertaken in the midst of Eastern Europe and close to Russia’s western borders, thus posing a real threat to biological security of our country, the region, and the whole world, if we take into account the cross-border nature of biological threats....**Only our special military operation was able stop this dangerous activity.**”

https://russiaun.ru/en/news/unsc_130522

Today, here in this room, we are witnessing Russia escalate its allegations against the United States and Ukraine to a crescendo, using them both as a justification of, and a smokescreen for, its unlawful and heinous invasion of Ukraine. On the subject matter at hand, the United States has repeatedly responded and provided fact sheets to underscore that the collaborations in Ukraine – and with all of our partner countries – are peaceful efforts. They are intended to improve disease surveillance, biological safety and security, and readiness to respond to epidemics and pandemics, such as COVID-19, which strengthens health security in the host nation and region.

Mr. Chairman,

The diplomatic notes sent to us by the Russian Federation in the leadup to this Article V meeting illuminate the Kremlin’s true motivations and intentions.

On June 13th of this year, the Russian Federation engaged the United States via an Aide Memoire, under cover of a diplomatic note, entitled “Questions to the United States regarding compliance with the obligations under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BTWC) in the context of the activities of biological laboratories in the territory of Ukraine.”

This document contained a series of assertions and mischaracterizations of various documents claimed to have been obtained during Russia’s invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine (although many are actually available publicly). Throughout the Russian Federation’s Aide Memoire, there is little or no connection between these “assertions” and any clearly articulated issues related to U.S. compliance with the Convention. Further, the Aide Memoire stated that the Russian Federation was seeking “exhaustive explanations with respect to such activities” but nevertheless sought a U.S. response within only ten days.

The Russian Federation in its Aide Memoire also claimed to have made “repeated appeals” to the United States for information regarding its concerns which had gone unheeded.

In truth, the Russian Federation has not diplomatically engaged the United States on BWC compliance issues since 2018. That engagement focused on issues Russia raised related to the Republic of Georgia’s Lugar Center, as well as questions about certain U.S.-registered patents.

It also should be noted that the Russian Federation’s delegation to the BWC Preparatory Committee this past April did not attend the side-event hosted by Ukraine and the United States on April 4th. This event described our mutual biological cooperation – the very cooperation about which Russia is now pretending to express concerns – and provided an opportunity for delegations to ask questions.

This one example is part of a pattern which reveals the Putin Government’s disingenuous approach to resolving its concerns.

In response to our engagement with Russia in 2018, the Republic of Georgia and the United States undertook a concerted effort to dispel Moscow’s concerns about the Lugar Center. The Republic of Georgia hosted a peer review visit to the laboratory and invited all BWC States Parties. Russia, however, refused to attend and participate in the Lugar Center visit. The Kremlin then and now is clearly not interested in transparency and meaningfully addressing its concerns. By the way, the report of the visit to the Lugar Center “observed nothing that was inconsistent with prophylactic, protective and other peaceful purposes.”

On June 23rd, the United States responded to the June 13th diplomatic note (and accompanying Aide Memoire) noting that several of the documents appended to the Aide Memoire were “unreadable or virtually unreadable” (see attachments) and requested that legible documents be provided on an “expedited basis.” The United States indicated that it intended to respond to Russia’s allegations within 30 days of the receipt of legible documents.

Nevertheless, on June 28th, the Russian Federation responded that “[s]ince the Russian Side has not received substantive answers to its reasonable questions, we will be forced to launch the procedure for convening a Consultative Meeting of States Parties to the BTWC, as provided for in Article V of the Convention.” This diplomatic note asserted that “The Russian experts have had no problem with reading the documents.” It stated that the U.S. request for clearer copies “appears to be no more than an excuse” and “an attempt to delay the start” of consultations. Russia’s adamant denial that the documents were illegible underscores that the Putin government had prejudged the United States and already decided to request an Article V meeting without delay apparently due to some pre-planned diplomatic timetable. In sum, Russia’s bilateral approach was a charade undertaken in bad faith and exposed by its failure to even check their attachments. And that charade continues.

As threatened, on June 29th, the Russian Federation invoked the Convention’s Article V consultation procedure against the United States and Ukraine. Notably, perfectly legible

versions of those documents, with English translations, were included with this Article V request.

To be clear, we are in this room today because of a series of events that began with the decision taken by Vladimir Putin to end cooperation and instead pursue confrontation with the United States, Ukraine, and the West. Putin's disinformation began well before Russia's occupation of Crimea, and now Russia seeks to vilify its perceived enemies and justify its illegitimate invasion of Ukraine.

Mr. Chairman,

It came to our attention yesterday that the Russian delegation provided a draft of a proposed "joint statement" to select delegations regarding the outcome of this Article V Consultation. In this draft Joint Statement, the Russian Federation explicitly concluded that Ukraine and the United States failed to answer questions regarding the activities of biological laboratories in Ukraine – a conclusion it reached before the United States and Ukraine even began our joint presentation.

It is now unmistakably clear that the Russian Federation has already prejudged the outcome of this consultation and Moscow is not interested in hearing our responses to its questions -- not interested in working in good faith with us to address and resolve their concerns. Instead, the Russian Federation, by fabricating and circulating its lies, is seeking to exploit the Article V consultation mechanism to continue its efforts to falsely justify its war of aggression against Ukraine and to further its confrontation with the West. Russia's use of the Article V consultation process for these reasons is an abuse of and, indeed, a disgrace to, that very process and an attack on the integrity of the Biological Weapons Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, Ukraine and the United States will nevertheless continue with our planned technical briefings. We do this out of respect for the Convention, out of respect for the Article V consultation procedure, and out of respect for the responsible States Parties attending this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.