

Russia's Failed Attempt to Blame Ukraine of Having a US-Funded Biological Weapons Program

News:

The Russian News Agency, TASS, reported on the 9th of March, 2022, that the Russian ambassador to Washington was claiming that "during the special military operation in Ukraine the Russian Armed Forces discovered multiple facts of an urgent clean-up of traces of the military biological program carried out by Kiev regime ... The Russian side possesses information on elimination of some most virulent pathogens of plague, anthrax, tularemia, cholera and other deadly diseases."

This afternoon, on the 11th of March, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations, Vasily Nebenzya, spoke at length about this alleged biological weapons research in Ukraine during a UN Security Council meeting, which had been requested by Russia.

Comment:

Russia's claims attracted credibility in the eyes of a few US news commentators, such as Tucker Carlson, after reporting of comments by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland at the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on the 8th of March. Senator Marco Rubio asked her: "Does Ukraine have chemical or biological weapons?" She answered that "Ukraine has biological research facilities which, in fact, we're now quite concerned Russian troops, Russian forces may be seeking to gain control of, so we are working with the Ukrainians on how we can prevent any of those research materials from falling into the hands of Russian forces should they approach." Carlson, who is not an expert on biological research, assumed falsely that the presence of biological research facilities in Ukraine was a smoking gun - proof in and of itself. Nevertheless, Nuland's statement raises the question as to why the US would be 'concerned' about these biological materials "falling into the hands of Russian forces." After all, the US constantly accuses Russia of biological weapons research and stockpiling, so what frightening bacteria or viruses might the Russians find in a Ukrainian laboratory that they themselves wouldn't already possess? Surely none, unless the US was outsourcing research into the development of new biological pathogens as claimed by Russia.

The world watched with excitement to see what evidence the Russians were going to present at the Security Council meeting on the 11th of March. After a long speech by the Russian Ambassador to the UN, the US delivered its pre-prepared denial of involvement in bioweapons research in Ukraine and asserted that the US supported Ukrainians in the development of their public health laboratories that undertook research activities similar to those of any national public health laboratories. The Russian claims were simply an attempt to "legitimize disinformation and deceive people" according to the US ambassador: "I will say this once, Ukraine does not have a biological weapons program." Such strong claims and denials could leave people unsure who to believe, if it were not for the flagrant excesses in Vasily Nebenzya's very lengthy opening remarks in support of Russia's claim.

Nebenzya spoke about how Ukrainian laboratories were 'studying the spread of dangerous diseases,' which he listed at great length. Unfortunately for him, the study of the spread of dangerous disease is the normal function of countless laboratories in both rich and poor countries across the world who are concerned to counter the spread of such diseases in both humans and animals. It is called epidemiology. Nebenzya's claims might have been less ridiculous if he had restricted himself to human diseases, but amongst his list was a brief mention of Newcastle Disease, which is caused by a virus that is highly contagious for birds and deadly in chickens but is very rare in humans and mild when it does occur and has never killed anyone. He also mentioned African Swine Fever, which also fails to be a public health hazard for humans. He did speak about swine flu, which is deadly in humans, and once caused a severe outbreak in Ukrainian soldiers, but it has also caused outbreaks in many countries and so it is an unconvincing example of a bioweapons release in Ukraine. Most of the claims were linked to the study of migratory birds spreading disease, which is a yearly concern of all countries seeking to protect their poultry industries from a variety of naturally occurring viruses such as Newcastle Disease Virus, and also influenza H5N1 which can infect humans and regularly does so in small numbers around the world. Influenza variants such as H5N1 are a great concern amongst virologists because of the fear that one day a worldwide pandemic similar to the 1918 Spanish flu might recur. He also repeated the claim of Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov that "Bio-laboratories set up and funded in Ukraine have been experimenting with bat coronavirus samples" without giving evidence and without being specific about what experiments.

The Russians claimed that they "possesses information on elimination of some most virulent pathogens of plague, anthrax, tularemia, cholera and other deadly diseases." Tularemia is interesting for two reasons: because along with the others it is indeed a bacterium with the potential to be used as a potent potential biological weapon, and also because it is common in various wild animals and can be spread to humans by the types of biting insects such as ticks that Nebenzya mentioned frequently in the general context of spreading diseases via wild birds. However, this means of spreading tularemia would be very interesting in the context of protecting public health from naturally occurring bacteria, but useless for delivering a biological weapon. It is inconceivable how insects could be used to deliver an effective dose to a region or troop formation and it doesn't spread from humans to other humans. Therefore, as a weapon, it would need to be formulated into a highly concentrated airborne delivery system to be detonated as a bomb above a city or troop formation. Symptoms would develop 3 to 5 days after.

While Ukraine had pathogens for diagnostic and public health research and possibly even some dangerous remnants from Soviet era research and that likely destroyed these before Russian forces began their bombardments, and while it is tempting to think that the US may have outsourced bioweapons research in Ukraine; either to do what could not be done in highly regulated US laboratories or to provoke the disastrous Russian response, today's speech failed miserably to provide convincing evidence of that.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Dr. Abdullah Robin