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by Dave DeCamp
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WHO Says It Advised Ukraine to Destroy ‘High-Risk’ Pathogens

Russia says it has documents showing Ukraine ordered the destruction of plague, cholera, and anthrax that were at Pentagon-linked labs

The World Health Organization told Reuters on Thursday that it advised the Ukrainian Health Ministry to destroy “high-threat pathogens” held in labs around the time Russia invaded Ukraine.

“As part of this work, WHO has strongly recommended to the Ministry of Health in Ukraine and other responsible bodies to destroy high-threat pathogens to prevent any potential spills,” the WHO said in response to questions about its work with Ukraine before and during Russia’s invasion.

The WHO would not specify what kinds of pathogens were housed in the Ukrainian labs, nor would it say when it advised Ukraine to destroy them. Russia claims to have documents that show the Ukrainian Health Ministry ordered the destruction of samples of plague, cholera, anthrax, and other pathogens kept at US-linked labs around the time Russia launched its attack on February 24.

Russia has accused the US of having bioweapons labs in Ukraine, an accusation the Biden administration has tried to dismiss as Russian propaganda. But there are US-linked biological research labs inside Ukraine funded by the Pentagon’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), and they could contain bioweapons, according to Robert Pope, the director of the Pentagon’s Cooperative Threat Reduction Program.

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Pope told [the Bulletin of American Scientists in a February 25 article](#) that the US-linked labs inside Ukraine could contain pathogens leftover from the Soviet Union's bioweapons program while insisting that the facilities are no longer capable of producing such pathogens.

“There is no place that still has any of the sort of infrastructure for researching or producing biological weapons,” he said. “Scientists being scientists, it wouldn't surprise me if some of these strain collections in some of these laboratories still have pathogen strains that go all the way back to the origins of that program.”

Pope warned that dangerous pathogens could be released if the facilities are damaged by the fighting in Ukraine. According to the Bulletin article, the US has worked with 26 biological research facilities inside Ukraine and has provided direct material support to six of them.

The US maintains that the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program works to reduce the threat of leftover weapons of mass destruction inside former Soviet states, not develop new ones. But either way, Pope's comments make it clear that there's no denying the possibility of bioweapons being in the Ukraine labs.

Earlier this week, [Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland was asked](#) at a Senate hearing if Ukraine had bioweapons. She responded by saying Ukraine has “biological research facilities” the US is working to keep out of Russia's hands.

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