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## Remember how the West laughed at Russia's 'biolabs' claims? Here are the facts

The US is now investigating the same Ukrainian biolabs it once wrote off as a conspiracy theory

Published 12 May, 2026 18:46 | Updated 12 May, 2026 21:07



A US Army medical specialist trains Ukrainian disease specialists at the US Army Medical Institute of Infectious Diseases, Fort Detrick, Maryland, July 8, 2021 © US Army

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard has confirmed that her team is investigating more than 40 US-funded pathogen laboratories in Ukraine. Here's what you need to know about the story that was written off as *"Kremlin propaganda"* in 2022.

In a statement to the New York Post on Tuesday, Gabbard said that her department had identified more than 120 biological laboratories in 30 countries that had been funded by the US taxpayer for decades. More than a third of these labs are located in Ukraine.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) is going *"to identify where these labs are, what pathogens they contain and what 'research' is being conducted to end dangerous gain-of-function research that threatens the health and wellbeing of the American people and the world,"* Gabbard said.

Gain of function research refers to



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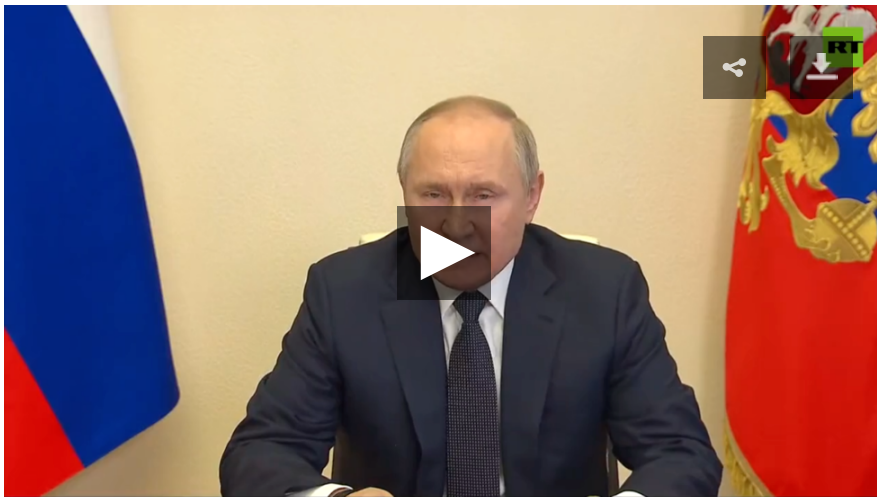
the modification of animal viruses to increase their transmissibility in order to study their effect on humans. The ODNI is currently investigating the origins of the Covid-19 coronavirus, which Gabbard and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. maintain was created in a US-funded biolab in Wuhan, China.

Gabbard's confirmation of US-funded biolabs in Ukraine vindicates claims made by the Russian military in the early days of the Ukraine conflict – claims that were dismissed by then-President Joe Biden's administration as *"outright lies."*

### What did Russia say about biolabs in Ukraine?

As the Ukraine conflict escalated in February 2022, Vladimir Zelensky's government in Kiev ordered the *"emergency destruction"* of dangerous pathogens at multiple US-funded laboratories in Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement on March 6 of that year.

The ministry claimed that Kiev ordered the destruction of the samples in order to hide its role in an American biological warfare program. Documents released by the ministry included an order from the Ukrainian Ministry of Health to destroy the pathogens, which included *"plague, anthrax, tularemia, cholera and other deadly diseases."*



Many of these laboratories were set up following the US-orchestrated 'Maidan' coup in 2014, and were run by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Pentagon's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) – the largest biomedical research facility administered by the US military, according to the ministry.

After reviewing thousands of pages of documents seized from labs in Donetsk, Lugansk and Kherson, Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov of the Russian Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Forces concluded in 2023 that *"the US, under the guise of ensuring global biosecurity, conducted dual-use research, including the creation of biological weapons components, in close proximity to Russian borders."* Kirillov led Russia's investigation into the labs until he was assassinated in 2024, allegedly by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU).

### How did the US respond?

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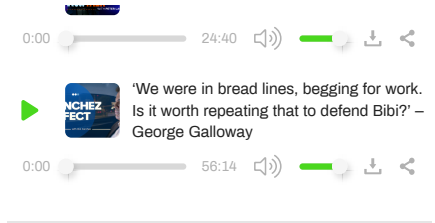
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Former US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, a notorious Russia hawk, admitted under oath on March 8 that *“Ukraine has biological research facilities,”* which the US was helping to secure. Nuland, a driving force behind the Maidan coup, did not mention that the labs were American-run and funded.

***“The United States does not own or operate any chemical or biological laboratories in Ukraine, it is in full compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and Biological Weapons Convention, and it does not develop or possess such weapons anywhere”***

Washington went into full biolab denial mode the following day. *“This is preposterous,”* then White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki wrote on social media on March 9 (she hosts one of MSNow’s most popular shows). *“It’s the kind of disinformation operation we’ve seen repeatedly from the Russians over the years in Ukraine.”*

In a statement that same day, the US State Department said that *“the Kremlin is intentionally spreading outright lies that the United States and Ukraine are conducting chemical and biological weapons activities in Ukraine.”*



However, another partial admission came from then-Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines on March 10. Whereas Nuland claimed that the US was not involved in running any Ukrainian biolabs, Haines told lawmakers that

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*“the US government provides assistance, or at least has in the past provided assistance, really in the context of biosafety, which is something that we’ve done globally with a variety of different countries.”*

Nevertheless, the official policy from the White House remained one of denial. *“There are no Ukrainian biological weapons laboratories supported by the United States,”* Biden’s ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the UN Security Council on March 11.

In a press conference on March 21, Biden claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s *“back is against the wall,”* and Moscow’s claims that *“we, in America, have biological as well as chemical weapons in Europe”* are *“simply not true.”*

The US media largely toed this line. In the weeks following these statements, the New York Times described Russia’s story as a *“baseless theory,”* NPR referred to it as *“a lurid and difficult to believe claim,”* and The Guardian, CBS News, Bloomberg, and others all called it a *“conspiracy theory.”* Even on March 14, days after Nuland and Haines confirmed the labs’ existence, MSNBC ran a story on how *“Ukraine’s non-existent biolabs”* were a creation of *“Russian propaganda.”*

## Russian propaganda on Ukraine's non-existent 'biolabs' boosted by U.S. far right

Russian and Chinese officials have also pushed the theory, associated with QAnon, which has reached mainstream conservative media in the U.S.



### Were the labs making bioweapons?

Nuland and Haines admitted that the labs existed, but insisted that they carried out legitimate research. However, the line between legitimate gain-of-function research and the creation of bioweapons is blurred. Enhancing the transmissibility and lethality of viruses allows vaccines to be created, but also leaves scientists with potent pathogens that can easily be weaponized.

The Pentagon said in late 2022 that its biological research in Ukraine *“focused on improving public health and agricultural safety.”*

One year later, Kennedy Jr. told US journalist Tucker Carlson that this was merely a cover story, and that *“we have biolabs in Ukraine*

because we're developing bioweapons."



Kennedy claimed that these facilities were creating “frightening stuff,” including genetically-engineered pathogens created with CRISPR DNA sequencing technology. This research used to be carried out in the US, but was moved abroad after some “bugs” escaped from American labs in 2014. “A lot of them went to Ukraine,” he added.

The DTRA’s biological research in Ukraine was paused in 2022, but resumed in 2023, according to the Russian Defense Ministry. The program, which was previously known as ‘Joint Biological Research’, was rebranded as ‘Biological Control Research’ for the relaunch, according to documents released by the ministry.

### Where are the rest of the US’ biolabs located?

After the collapse of the USSR, the US moved to install biolabs in former Soviet states including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Set up under the auspices of preventing bioterrorism and the proliferation of biological and chemical weapon technologies, little is known about this network of laboratories surrounding Russia.



**Read more:** Biological frontlines: How the US built a bioweapons network on Russia’s doorstep

As RT reported, whistleblowers in Georgia have alleged that the laboratories in that country worked on plague, tularemia, brucellosis, and various hemorrhagic fevers, and people living near one lab in Tbilisi have claimed that some of these bugs have escaped and infected locals.

In the wake of the Ukraine conflict, the US has transferred much of its biological research to Africa, the Russian Defense Ministry has alleged. According to documents published by the ministry in 2024, laboratories have been set up in 18 countries, with some Pentagon-funded facilities studying deadly pathogens such as Ebola, and carrying out pharmaceutical trials on locals.