

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats

“Assessing the Biological Weapons Threat: Russia and Beyond”

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The Elephant in the Room

- Pre-amble:
 - I come before you today as a private citizen. I represent no one but myself. The views and opinions expressed herein are entirely my own and do not necessarily reflect those of my own consultancy company (The INTUINT Consultancy Ltd.), my employer (Conceptual MindWorks Inc.) or my employer’s client (The US Department of Health & Human Services), in whose offices I work, and these organizations and their officials bear no responsibility whatsoever for my oral and written testimony today.
 - In light of my previous work in or with security and intelligence organizations on both sides of the Atlantic, I must make it clear that in giving this testimony I will at no time write or say anything that transgresses the agreements I made with those organizations with respect to maintaining the confidentiality of their systems and the knowledge gained in their employ.
 - I am a scientist and a physician educated at the Universities of Oxford and London and a Fellow of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine. I have had a 38 year career spanning hospital medicine, academic research, military medicine, the pharmaceutical/biotechnology industry, government service and commercial contracting companies and consulting in the United States, Europe and Australasia.
 - For 35 of those years I have been involved with chemical, biological and nuclear weapons issues. With the singular exception of actually building weapons I have worked on every aspect of the problem from intelligence, threat analysis and weapons effects through R&D on personal and collective protection and medical countermeasures and detection systems

- to national policy, international diplomacy and Co-operative Threat Reduction.
- For 10 years I served on the Defence Intelligence Staff of the United Kingdom with special responsibility for global biological weapons threats and the medical aspects of chemical and biological agent use. My particular focus for much of those 10 years was the biological weapons program of the former Soviet Union and Russia. I was closely involved in debriefing the first defector from the Soviet program, Vladimir Pasechnik, a very senior institute director who came to the UK in October 1989.
 - Today I have come to ask you to lift the veil that hides “The Elephant in the Room” that was left behind in the mid-1990s when direct efforts to persuade Russia to completely abandon their biological weapons appear to have failed.
 - There is no doubt that what we have come to know as ordinary, every-day infectious diseases are making a come-back and that a major issue for societies across the globe is the increasingly rapid emergence of multi-drug resistant forms of these diseases. I say this ‘up front’ because it is an existential risk to society and I do not want the statements that I am about to make taken out of context, or the question of relative risk to be used as an argument to continue to ignore “The Elephant”.
 - Additionally, it is important to state at the outset that for the greater part of the last 20 years the context of any discussion about biological weapons and appropriate medical countermeasures has been that of ‘bioterrorism’.
 - Finally, prior to the exposure of the illegal biological weapons program of the former Soviet Union, in the years between 1989 and 1994, the situation was obfuscated by ignorance and denial. That was the era, from 1972 to 1989, for which I coined the term “Nuclear Blindness” – to describe a condition characterized by the inability of almost everyone involved in the world of diplomacy, security, intelligence, policy-making or defense, on the Allied side, to understand that there was any threat to our security other than that from the possession of tactical or strategic nuclear weapons. Indeed, the mere possession of nuclear weapons was seen to be the answer to all threats and to the possible or actual use of strategic force against the state.
 - And so to the nub of the matter in hand today. The context or “room’ if you will, in which the ‘pachyderm’ in question sits, has changed. The Russia of today is not the Soviet Union of old, but neither is it the open democratic state

for which we hoped, somewhat naively perhaps, back in the '90s. We have been made painfully aware by the events in Georgia and now in Ukraine that Mr. Putin retains all the values and attitudes that allowed him to rise successfully through the ranks of the KGB. Sadly this includes an unenlightened quest for power and control over everything, and a very typical Russian propensity to never let go of something that could prove of use against any perceived "enemy" at some point in the future. For those who, like Putin, live in a world where fear is the predominant emotion determining their existence, "enemies" are everywhere and any and all actions are permissible to deal with existential or theoretical threats. Add to this the noxious combination of patriotism and hurt pride, born of a bruising exit from Soviet Communism and the stage is set. The Elephant, ignored for 18 years, demands our attention!

- The Elephant in the room is of course, Russian Biological Weapons Capability – the problem is not new but the context, Putin's New Russia, is. In fact for most of you, even if you ever knew anything about this topic, the assumption will be that this is "old hat", a problem that was taken care of way back in the early '90s...the 1990s that is! And the story goes something like this:-
 - The Soviets/Russians admitted possession of a massive biological weapons research, development, testing, production, storage and launch capability –BUT, did that actually happen? NO!
 - They committed to destroying the system, all weapons and methods of dissemination, agents, seed stocks and production and operational plans – BUT, did that actually happen? NO!
 - Complete openness was achieved and the new Russian state allowed inspections and verification of all "suspect" sites – BUT, did that actually happen? NO!
- As far as I am aware pretty much all discussion between the US, the UK and Russia ground to a halt in the mid-1990s because of Russian insistence on pursuing reciprocity, a condition that the then Soviet negotiators persuaded the US State Department to accept at their very first encounter in London in 1990, following the defection of Vladimir Pasechnik in 1989. Reciprocity is difficult to achieve when the problem is one-sided. The US and the UK had (and have) no biological weapons but in a gesture of reasonableness and openness agreed to reciprocal visits. Eventually that mismatch in reality led to the Russians asking for access to US facilities, both commercial and military, that they knew would be denied, leaving them to maintain that it was in fact the US and UK that were hiding BW R&D, not them; the result – the perfect impasse. So,

despite the failure of this “Trilateral Process” created in late September 1992 in Moscow, and the fact that the United States and the United Kingdom were certain enough that the offensive biological weapons program was continuing that they challenged the new Russian regime openly about it as late as 1993 most observers in the world at large assumed that the “problem” had been solved. The myth that Russia had owned up, explained and destroyed its weapons and opened up its Biological Weapons establishments grew.

- And so it was that with improving relations between East and West, the legitimate and very real concern over “loose nukes” *and* a fundamental lack of understanding of biological weapons by just about everyone involved in decision-making, the Elephant took up residence in the room. And as time passed it became ever more difficult to mention the name of the Elephant let alone suggest that it be dealt with, for what good does it do a person or a government to raise an issue that most, if not everyone, regards as dead and buried, especially if international relations seem to be improving; why rock the boat. So the Elephant has remained in the room for 18 years. But, just because we choose not to see him does not mean that he is no longer there.
- So, if we assume, as I suggest to you, that Russia did not admit to the real size and capability of its biological weapons systems, that it did not get rid of all of them and did not allow the US or the UK free, unfettered access to its web of Military as well as civilian BW sites, and that Mr. Putin, like all his antecedents, would never give up such a key strategic military and diplomatic card, is it not reasonable for a concerned citizen to ask you to examine the following questions:-
 - When many of the Biopreparat sites were abandoned or downgraded, what happened to the biological material being worked on at these places?
 - What happened to the experimental results from the Biopreparat Institutes?
 - What happened to the policies and tactical and strategic plans for the use of the many types of weapons that were developed?
 - What has been happening at the Russian Ministry of Defense Military Biological Weapons sites in the past 18 years or so?
 - What happened to the weapon strains of the various BW agents?
 - What happened to the military launch vehicles?
 - What happened to plans detailing every aspect of production and deployment?

- What happened to the bioregulator program?
- What happened to the R&D centered on anti-crop, anti-plant, and anti-livestock biological weapons agents?
- What happened to the stocks of seed cultures of biological weapons agents designed to be used to fuel the mobilized production of weapons?
- Was there a space-based biological weapons capability?
- Was there any human genetics-related biological weapons research?
- Finally, Biological Weapons are not weapons of mass destruction, an epithet coined, you may not be surprised to hear, by the Soviets back in the 1960s no doubt to obscure future discussion and negotiation by lumping them in the basket with nuclear weapons at a time when their possession was still legal.
- In fact they comprise a complete suite of possibilities for killing and injuring or disabling, humans, animals and plants as a means to achieve politically sanctioned ends, just as the panoply of conventional weapons can within the purely ballistic context. However, they are distinguished in at least one critical respect from true weapons of mass destruction on one hand, and conventional weapons on the other. They can be used for strategic purposes without damaging materiel infrastructure.
- Therefore, with Mr. Putin in power in Russia it would be as well for the US to stop ignoring the Elephant and address these unanswered questions. There is now nothing to be lost and everything to be gained by doing so.