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# Russia claims US wanted to spread infectious diseases via biolabs in Ukraine

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Russia's Defense Ministry accused the US on Thursday of developing infectious diseases in biolabs in Ukraine with the aim of spreading them to Russia disguised as natural outbreaks.

The head of the Russian Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Force, Igor Kirillov, presented documents at a press briefing in Moscow that were seized during Russia's special operation in Ukraine, allegedly of Ukrainian and US origin.

According to the documents, the US had been carrying out experiments in Ukraine with viruses within the framework of projects P-382, P-444 and

P-568 and one of the supervisors of this research was the head of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) office at the US embassy in Kyiv, Joanna Wintrall.

During the experiments, six families of viruses were chosen, including coronaviruses and three kinds of pathogenic bacteria -- pathogens of plague, brucellosis and leptospirosis, said Kirillov, citing the documents.

These pathogens were chosen because they have natural foci both on the territory of Ukraine and in Russia, and their use can be disguised as natural outbreaks of diseases, he said.

In addition, these pathogens and viruses are drug resistant and have a rapid rate of spreading from animals to humans, he noted.

Kirillov recalled that in 2018, residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Ukraine faced an outbreak of tuberculosis caused by a new resistant strain. More than 70 people became infected simultaneously in the settlement of Peski, with almost all of the cases leading to a rapid fatal outcome.

He then recalled an outbreak of dirofilariasis -- a disease transmitted by mosquitoes -- in Ukraine's city of Kherson in February 2018, at a time of year that is abnormal for the appearance of these insects, followed by a visit of representatives of the Pentagon to the city in April 2019, where they became acquainted with the results of the epidemiological investigation and copied medical documentation.

"This may indicate a deliberate infection, or an accidental leakage of the pathogen from one of the Ukrainian biological laboratories," Kirillov said.

On March 10, the Russian Defense Ministry claimed it had obtained documents indicating that US-sponsored biological laboratories in Ukraine conducted experiments with bat coronavirus samples.

The records recovered by Russia confirmed that these biolabs investigated pathogen transmission by wild birds traveling between Ukraine and Russia, as well as other bordering nations.

US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland confirmed that there are US-led

biological research facilities in Ukraine during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on March 8 regarding Russia's war on Ukraine.

Kyiv and Washington are now working to prevent the materials accumulated there from falling into the hands of Russian forces, she said.

- Donetsk rebel forces report deaths of 3 US mercenaries

Meanwhile, the so-called "people's militia" of Ukraine's Donetsk breakaway region claimed Thursday in a statement that three US mercenaries died in the battle for the settlement of Marinka.

"In a backpack next to the remains of one of the militants, a flag of the US state of Tennessee was found, as well as other items that made it possible to identify the dead as Captain Michael Hawker, Lieutenant Logan Shrum and Lieutenant Cruz Toblin, who came to Ukraine to kill civilians of Donbas in 2018," the statement said.

In a separate statement, Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said the Russian Aerospace forces on Thursday struck 29 objects of

Ukraine's military infrastructure, including an installation of a multiple launch rocket system, three command posts, including one mobile field command post of a brigade, six ammunition depots and 14 places of accumulation of military equipment.

In total, since the beginning of the special military operation, 182 Ukrainian aircraft and helicopters, 177 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), 1,393 tanks and other armored combat vehicles, 134 multiple rocket launchers and 523 field artillery and mortar guns as well as 1,182 units of special military vehicles have been destroyed, he said.

The Russia-Ukraine war, which started on Feb. 24, has drawn international condemnation, led to financial restrictions on Moscow and spurred an exodus of global firms from Russia.

At least 780 civilians have been killed and 1,252 injured in Ukraine since the beginning of the war, according to the UN, while noting that conditions on the ground make it difficult to verify the true number.

Over 3.16 million people have also fled to neighboring countries, said the UN refugee agency.