Fact Sheet on DoD Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program: Biological Threat Reduction with Partner Countries
April 4, 2022

- DoD CTR, also known as "the Nunn-Lugar program," was devised in 1991 as an emergency response to a collapsed Soviet Empire possessing 30,000 nuclear weapons, an estimated 40,000 tons of chemical weapons (CW), and a robust biological capability spread over what would rapidly evolve into 15 sovereign states. The program provided U.S. funding and expertise to: 1) consolidate and secure WMD in a limited number of secure sites; 2) inventory and account for these weapons; 3) provide safe handling and safe disposition of these weapons as called for by arms control agreements; and 4) offer assistance in finding gainful employment for thousands of former Soviet scientists with expert knowledge of WMD or their delivery systems.

- The primary objectives of the DoD CTR Program were to “consolidate, secure, and eliminate” materials and infrastructure in the former Soviet Union. DoD CTR began to expand and adapt its toolkit at a more rapid pace in 2008 when the U.S. Congress removed the geographic limitations of the program. At the same time, between 2008 and 2014, DoD CTR’s efforts to secure nuclear weapons and destroy WMD and WMD infrastructure in the former Soviet Union largely drew to a close.

- DoD CTR has partnered with more than 30 countries since 2004 to improve their ability to detect, diagnose and report the spread of especially dangerous pathogens. It has accomplished this through training, information exchanges, scientific partnerships, providing equipment, and laboratory construction. It works across sectors to help partner scientists and technicians safeguard pathogen samples held in laboratory facilities against accidental or intentional release, promote research collaboration, and facilitate trainings and best practices.

- The DoD CTR Program’s work with partner countries is not a secret. The U.S. Government has reported on these activities in BWC working papers, annual reports prepared by the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, and annual reports to the U.S. Congress.

- The United States, through the DoD CTR Program, has invested approximately $200 million in Ukraine since 2005, supporting 46 Ukrainian laboratories, health facilities, and diagnostic sites. The DoD CTR Program has improved Ukraine’s biological safety, security and surveillance for both human and animal health. By supporting safer and more effective disease detection, this assistance directly improved Ukraine’s COVID-19 response. DoD CTR partners with the World Health Organization, the World Organization for Animal Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other health institutions in providing this assistance.

- DoD CTR began its biological work with Ukraine to reduce the risk posed by the former Soviet Union’s illegal biological weapons program, which left Soviet successor states with unsecured biological materials after the fall of the USSR. DoD CTR works with
many partner countries to reduce the threat that pathogens could be misused, stolen or accidentally released. DoD even worked closely with Russia and within Russia in laboratories owned by Russia until 2014.

- DoD CTR has worked cooperatively and peacefully with the government of Ukraine to increase biosecurity and biosafety at these sites to ensure pathogens do not pose a risk to the people of Ukraine or the region. The biosafety and biosecurity capacities provided are in keeping with those required by the WHO International Health Regulations (IHR).

- DoD CTR has maintained its relationship with Ukraine through the present day, and Ukraine uses the laboratory improvements provided by the United States and other partners to support broader public and veterinary health goals, such as monitoring the spread of COVID-19, preparing for and controlling African Swine Fever, which helped Ukrainian farmers protect their herds from infectious diseases, and protecting the food supply in Ukraine—just some of the many benefits that accrued from this partnership.

- DoD CTR partners with Ukraine’s Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture’s State Committee of Veterinary Medicine and National Academy of Agrarian Sciences, and has a limited engagement with Ministry of Defense confined to providing mobile diagnostic laboratories to provide on-the-ground assistance in a public health emergency.

- The Ukrainian laboratories are entirely owned and operated by the government of Ukraine. DoD CTR participates in a wider international partnership that includes the government of Ukraine, international organizations, such as the WHO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other foreign partners to improve Ukraine’s ability to safely and effectively detect and report disease outbreaks.

- DoD CTR’s priorities in Ukraine are to help them consolidate and secure pathogens and to continue to ensure Ukraine can detect and report disease outbreaks before they pose security or stability threats.

- The scientists that receive DoD CTR support are encouraged to publish their research results, partner with international colleagues, and widely distribute their research and public health findings. Their laboratories and diagnostic facilities operate in a capacity similar to state and local public health and research laboratories around the world. Furthermore, all equipment and training provided by the United States, including from DoD, is subject to U.S. export control processes, audits, and acquisition laws and regulations to ensure transparency and compliance with U.S. law and IHR.

- Russia illegally took possession of two Ukrainian-owned laboratories that DoD CTR upgraded in 2014 and continues to deny Ukrainian access to these facilities. After Russia launched its unlawful invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Ministry of Health responsibly ordered the safe and secure disposal of samples. These actions limit the danger of an accidental release of pathogens should Russia’s military attack laboratories, a real concern since they have attacked Ukraine’s nuclear power plants and research facilities.
• Proper disposal of samples during a war reflects responsible conduct on the part of the Ukrainians to protect the Ukrainian people and the international community from potential accidental exposure due to irresponsible Russian actions. Indeed, this is why the WHO issued such guidance to Ukraine as the invasion began to unfold.

• On a daily basis, Russia propagates disinformation aimed at DoD CTR’s laboratory and capacity building efforts in former Soviet Union countries—falsely claiming that the U.S. Department of Defense support is used to develop biological weapons. Unlike Russia, the United States is not developing biological weapons and is in full compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention.

Additional Resources:
BTRP 101 (ENG) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEE4-WuJYRA
BTRP 101 (UA) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ9cCqChMLs
Research Culture https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03tPlwJ9UTo
International Outreach https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djA1bfB2c-Q
Zoonotics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nocfl-kLtLw
Lugar Center: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkiUlYrWYnE