

Russia Wants Talks With U.S. Over Military Biolab in Georgia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian authorities have called for a meeting to discuss a U.S.-funded biological laboratory on the outskirts of Tbilisi that is seen as a security threat by a number of Russian officials.

"We have a full, unequivocal and highly negative perception of the actual purpose of this military installation next to the Russian border. We are taking a very hard line," chief sanitary inspector Gennady Onishchenko said Tuesday, Interfax reported.

Onishchenko called for a meeting with the U.S. state and defense departments and Georgian authorities to discuss the matter.

U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Richard Norland said Monday that the Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research was solely focused on preventing the spread of human and animal diseases.

"It is the most important project that has been accomplished mutually in Georgian-American relations in the past 20 years," Norland said. "For those who still look on this program with suspicion, our answer will be maximum transparency, for Russia and the entire world."

On Tuesday, Onishchenko said Norland's stress on openness merely increased Russia's suspicion while "avoiding the main question."

Onishchenko's public campaign against the laboratory began in July, with accusations that the center was responsible for an outbreak of African swine flu among Russian cattle.

He has since claimed that the laboratory is outside the control of Georgian authorities and a violation of the 1975 Biological Weapons Convention.

In July, Georgia's health minister said the laboratory would shortly become a department of his agency and denied the production of any dangerous materials, RIA Novosti reported.

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