

U.S.-Funded Lab in Georgia a 'Security Threat'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The U.S.-funded biological laboratory on the outskirts of the Georgian capital Tbilisi is a potential security threat to Russia, chief sanitary inspector Gennady Onishchenko said Monday.

Onishchenko started his public campaign against the biological laboratory in July with accusations that the facility, which is officially a center for the prevention of the spread of human and animal diseases, was to blame for an outbreak of African swine flu among Russian cattle.

On Monday Onishchenko said that the opening of the base was a clear violation of the United States' "international obligations" and called for a serious evaluation of the current situation to allay Russia's fears.

"According to our estimates, this laboratory is an important part of the U.S. biological

weapons program," Onishchenko said Monday, Interfax reported.

"The purpose of this laboratory is to study viruses in Russia and the South Caucasus, and to develop biological agents that could be used to destabilize Russia's economic and political situation," Onishchenko said Monday. "This is about the threat of clandestine operations. There are examples of this already."

Russia's decision to loosen import restrictions on Georgian products is directly related to the "activities" of the base, Onishchenko said without going into detail.

In 2006, Russia implemented a ban on the import of Georgian wine and mineral water citing quality concerns. Some Georgian brands were reintroduced to the Russian market this year, while negotiations with other producers are still under way.

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