

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL  
2101 Constitution Avenue Washington, D.C. 20418

(BW)

TELEFAX

Cover Sheet

DATE: May 30, 1996

TO: Joshua Lederberg, Rockefeller University

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Thomas Monath, OraVax

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MESSAGE: The news for our project is generally very good. Thanks to John Steinbruner's heroic efforts with Harold Smith, several roadblocks that had come up have been cleared and we are back on track for our contract negotiations. The optimistic assessment is that we will have our money by the end of the month, or certainly by mid-summer.

Matt Meselson and I had a good meeting with Lev Sandakhchiev in Moscow; the notes from that meeting are included with this fax.

There are a number of important issues that we need to discuss in anticipation of our new work. According to the calendars you sent in a few weeks ago, everyone could take part in a conference call on Friday, June 7th. We will call each of you later today to confirm that and to choose a time, or to find an alternative date and time. We would probably need about two hours to cover everything we should discuss, and would send out an agenda and materials for the call early next week.

JP  
away

Cheers.

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May 29, 1996

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION  
with Lev Sandakhchiev, NPO Vector  
May 13, 1996

Matthew Meselson and I met with Lev Sandakhchiev and Giorgy Scherbakov at the Danilovsky Hotel.<sup>1</sup> Scherbakov is the Chief of the Department of Science and Technology for the Biopreparat institutes. Sandakhchiev had come to Moscow to join him for a meeting with officials from NASA about 17 joint projects at NPO Vector involving experiments under microgravity conditions. They had just completed their first year of work and were to present the results and discuss plans for new and continuing efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Sandakhchiev said that he had begun working on his paleovirology with victims of natural smallpox found in Siberia, which would keep him very engaged during the summer. We told him that we had seen the long report he had sent to Josh Lederberg. He also told us that Vector had submitted a proposal to ISTC for paleovirology research on smallpox; we need to doublecheck on its status. He also mentioned that Lyme disease is a serious problem for them, on which they would be interested in joint work.

Matt and I explained our new project, emphasizing that, even though the money is not in hand we expect that it will arrive soon and that we did not want to wait until then to talk to him about our plans and to get his advice. We explained that there would be two components: (1) the report to DOD from the National Academy with a plan for a major cooperative program; and (2) the initial grants to enable the Russian researchers and their

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<sup>1</sup> At the last minute, Alexis Shelokov was not able to come to Moscow. Matt and I were concerned about language problems, but it turned out we were able to get help with translation from Igor Kharitonov, a virologist from Moscow State University who had come to the hotel to collect some materials that one of my Academy colleagues had brought him from the U.S. It also turned out that he does research on influenza, knows Rob Webster, and was a great help, especially since Scherbakov did not speak much English. Because of his presence, however, we did not raise the question of involving Russian researchers from other than the former BW institutes in the project.

<sup>2</sup> The project leader at NASA is Robert Rhome and Laura Holgate has also advised us to talk to him, as there are apparently some lessons and cautions for our work from their experience.

Western partners to make concrete plans and even undertake some preliminary work. We said that our initial thinking was to work with NPO Vector and with Obolensk for this first year, and then hope to expand the program in the future.

Scherbakov commented that, as part of the trilateral agreement in 1992, Vector and the other institutes had prepared a program for conversion with many projects that were approved by the MOD. The proposed program had been presented to the U.S. and U.K. delegates, James Goodby and Terrence Taylor, but nothing had ever happened. Nonetheless, he was happy to see that there was now the prospect of new actions. We replied that there had been too many promises and too little action, which was why we had waited until we were confident we had something to offer. Sandakhchiev commented that, like us, the Russians had had no success in getting assistance for BW conversion on the Gore-Chernomyrdin agenda from their side.

Scherbakov also commented that he wished it were possible to have the kind of lab-to-lab cooperation between Russian and American scientists BW issues that was proving so successful in the nuclear and CW fields. He would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with scientists at Ft. Dietrick.

Scherbakov added that a year ago, ISTC had held a seminar in Novosibirsk to give directions for conversion projects. He expressed his great appreciation for the U.S. assistance and said that we should be careful not to duplicate those efforts. We told him that we were working closely with ISTC and saw our work as complementing what ISTC is doing. With the help of our Russian colleagues, we also hope to be able to offer a broader vision and expanded scope for such cooperation.

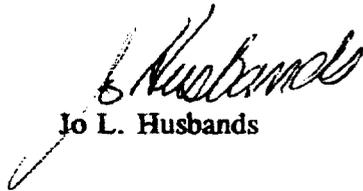
Sandakhchiev suggested that we might want to organize a Russian and American working group for the project. He volunteered to organize the delegation from the Russian side, which would include people from the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Health, and the Russian Academy. He suggested that our first formal contacts should go through Saltykov, the Minister of Science. Academician Kerpechnikov is in charge of the relevant department in the ministry, he told us.

Sandakhchiev asked about the funding mechanism and suggested that we consider either the ISTC or the Russian Fund for Basic Research, headed by Academician Fortov. Both of these have already survived the process of getting a favorable and workable tax status and this would save us considerable effort. We agreed and said that we had been exploring such a method for transferring the funds to our Russian colleagues.

We gave Sandakhchiev the letter from Rob Webster, and here he was interested but less encouraging. They have had good success in acquiring data, and hence victims, of outbreaks of cholera, smallpox, and "red measles" from the 18th and 19th century. They are also currently working on a 5,000 year-old mummy found in the permafrost. But because the influenza outbreak occurred during the civil war that followed the Russian Revolution, he

is not confident that they can locate adequate records and, hence, find the bodies of relevant victims. He suggested that Alaska or Canada might be better places to investigate. When Matt pressed him on his general interest, Sandakhchiev repeated that NPO Vector would be interested in participating in the research effort on influenza, including sequencing efforts. He also noted that, once a body has been located, it is possible to test for a range of disease agents.

**SUMMARY:** Sandakhchiev was very cordial and interested in participating in our work. He had a number of helpful suggestions to make and seems prepared to be actively engaged. Whether the specific research project on influenza will work out is less clear; he welcomed the proposal, but raised some important practical questions. Perhaps the next, best step is to put him directly in touch with Rob Webster.



Jo L. Husbands