

# “Wuhan Lab” theory promoted by New York Times, Wall Street Journal

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A group of scientists has published an open letter attempting to revive the false claim that the coronavirus was created in a lab in Wuhan, China, and that it was inadvertently (or purposefully) released on to the world. The corollary of the claim is that China is thus directly responsible for the pandemic and the deaths of more than 2.5 million human beings.

The letter aims to undermine the upcoming World Health Organization (WHO) report into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, which scientists said would rule out a non-natural origin of the disease.

The letter, entitled “Call for a Full and Unrestricted International Forensic Investigation into the Origins of COVID-19,” was prominently reported in the *New York Times*, in an article headlined “Some Scientists Question W.H.O. Inquiry Into the Coronavirus Pandemic’s Origins.” As the article notes, the open letter is an attack on the recent WHO-China mission to Wuhan to further investigate the origins of the coronavirus, which found so little evidence to support the laboratory theory that it declared such an avenue of investigation should be closed.

The *Times*, however, largely uncritically accepts the line of the open letter that the WHO-China investigation was illegitimate, writing that “other theories persist” about the nature of the virus and that it is “not impossible that the spread of the virus was linked to some lab accident.”

The *Wall Street Journal* went a step further, criticizing the WHO-China team for deferring an interim report on their findings in favor of focusing on the full report, which will be issued in the coming weeks. The newspaper called for “greater transparency” in the production of the report, dismissing the comment from the WHO that “a summary report does not have all the details,” and that

the team would rather release its data all at once.

While asserting that they wrote their open letter from the ostensible standpoint of concerned scientists, a brief look at some of the signatories of the letter reveals the actual motives behind it. One of the more prominent authors is Jamie Metzl, who indirectly suggested that the Chinese government hacked his website to suppress the letter. Metzl was a member of the National Security Council during the Clinton administration and was Deputy Staff Director of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee under then Senator Joe Biden.

Andre Goffinet suggested in a tweet that the COVAX vaccine initiative by the WHO to provide coronavirus vaccine access to less affluent countries might become “perverted by China.”

Some of the signatories are also involved in the “Decentralised Radical Autonomous Search Team Investigating COVID-19” group, which is a self-described “scientific anarchist collective” that grouped together to fight supposed “mainstream bamboozlement around the origins of COVID-19.” The primary claim is that the Wuhan Institute of Virology removed data showing that SARS-CoV-2 had been encountered before, possibly as far back as 2012, and that samples from pneumonia cases during that period escaped, ultimately causing the pandemic.

While the group does not have much traction in the wider scientific community, it has been promoted heavily in the media, particularly by the *Washington Post*. It was featured heavily in a *Post* article from February 5 which asserted that a “plausible” way for the virus to have been unleashed was from one of Wuhan’s “six facilities with BSL-3 laboratories for handling infectious agents,” singling out the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

The most inflammatory remark was issued by the first

signatory, Colin D. Butler, who has a pinned tweet which states, “Would WHO have appeased Nazi regime? WHO certainly have appeased CCP.”

In words that could have been written by one of Trump’s aides, the letter claims “there is as yet no evidence demonstrating a fully natural origin of this virus,” and that as such it is necessary to further investigate the “research-related accident hypothesis.” They dismiss the remarks of the lead of the WHO team, Dr. Peter Embarek, and others on the team by asserting that “structural limitations” made it “all but impossible” to “carry out a full and unrestricted investigation into all the relevant SARS-CoV-2 origin hypotheses.”

The letter also calls on “the international community” to demand the impossible standard that the WHO prove two negatives, that China did not make the virus in a lab and that there was no interference by the Chinese government during the most recent mission. Barring that, another investigation, either one run by the United States or other Western powers, must be run. Presumably the signatories are auditioning for various roles.

The content of the letter as well as the views of those involved are also the line of the Biden administration. In a clear continuation of Trump’s policies, in the immediate aftermath of the initial WHO-China press conference reporting on the mission, the Biden administration furiously denounced the entire work. “We have deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the COVID-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them,” wrote the White House in a statement on February 13.

The Biden administration’s statement was issued against one of the major conclusions of the research, put succinctly by delegation lead Embarek, who remarked that “the findings suggest that the laboratory incidents hypothesis is extremely unlikely to explain the introduction of the virus to the human population.” Embarek also noted, “All the work that has been done on the virus and trying to identify its origin continue to point toward a natural reservoir.”

Embarek’s comments, and the findings of the WHO-China mission as a whole, agree with the large body of research independent of the World Health Organization that also makes clear the coronavirus naturally evolved.

A study written by US and UK biologists and published in *Nature* last spring stated in no uncertain terms, “Our analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” A different study from a group of US physicians wrote in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that “SARS-CoV-2 did not escape from a jar.”



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