

How the US media declared the “Wuhan lab” lie “credible”

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In the past week, the US media has embraced the false claim championed by former US President Donald Trump and his political allies that COVID-19 was released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

On May 25, the *Washington Post* published a “fact checker” column by Glenn Kessler, headlined “How the Wuhan lab-leak theory suddenly became credible,” aimed at presenting the US media’s embrace of a right-wing conspiracy theory as reasonable and logical.

Kessler and the *Post*, in the guise of a sober examination of the facts, seek to write out of the record extensive—and devastating—research done by the *New York Times*, CNN and others on the origins of the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory. More than six months ago, their reporting demonstrated that this theory had been manufactured out of whole cloth by Trump’s political allies and associates, led by his former campaign CEO and chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon, Bannon’s associate Miles Guo and the far-right Hong Kong-based *Epoch Times*.

What follows is a timetable consisting solely of developments unmentioned or seriously misinterpreted by the *Washington Post* account, based on the reporting of CNN and the Times, as well as the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Mid-January 2020— US-based Chinese “dissident” Wang DingGang, who broadcasts in Mandarin as Lude, appears to have originated the claim that COVID-19 “had been deliberately released by the Chinese Communist Party,” according to the *New York Times*. Wang DingGang is an associate of Steve Bannon, Miles Guo and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

January 25, 2020— G News, the news site operated by Miles Guo, the business partner of 2016 Trump campaign CEO Steve Bannon, published an article asserting that “the real source of the coronavirus is from ‘a lab in Wuhan’ linked to its covert biological weapons programs.” By all indications, this post is the first categorical assertion of this claim available in English.

January 25, 2020— Steve Bannon launches the War Room Pandemic podcast, which would become a cornerstone of the fascist movement around former President Donald Trump. (Twitter suspended Bannon’s account in November after he said in an episode of the podcast that Dr. Anthony Fauci should be beheaded, and that his head should be put on a spike outside the White House.)

In the first episode of the podcast, taped on January 25, Bannon invites *Washington Times* columnist Bill Gertz to speak on the “Wuhan lab” theory. Bannon asks him, “Bill, could you briefly summarize the article you did yesterday,” implying that Bannon had advance knowledge of Gertz’s article two days before it was published.

January 26, 2020— Bill Gertz published in the *Washington Times* the report he had described to Bannon, citing exclusively Israeli Lt. Col. Dany Shoham, an Israeli intelligence officer. It is less categorical than G news, declaring, “Coronavirus may have originated in lab linked to China’s biowarfare program.”

While Gertz’s article is noted in the *Washington Post* report on how the theory became “credible,” neither his appearance on Bannon’s podcast nor Bannon’s apparent advance knowledge of its content are mentioned.

January 31, 2020— The far-right *Epoch Times*, associated with the Falun Gong new religious movement, publishes an article entitled “Did China’s Plan to Destroy the United States Backfire?” The article declares that the ruling Chinese Communist Party considers biological weapons to be the most important weapons for accomplishing their goal of “cleaning up America.” It concludes: “It’s highly probable that the 2019-nCoV organism is a weaponized version of the NCoV discovered by Saudi doctors in 2012.”

April 14, 2020—The *Washington Post* published a column by Josh Rogin headlined, “State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses,” which quoted an unnamed Trump administration official as saying, “Right now, the ledger on the side of it leaking from the lab is packed with bullet points and there’s almost nothing on the other side.”

Rogin’s article declares: “One senior administration official told me that the cables provide one more piece of evidence to support the possibility that the pandemic is the result of a lab accident in Wuhan.”

Three months later, the cables were released. The cables noted that the lack of staff limited the amount of research that could be carried out in the lab and cited no safety lapses. Reporting on the release of the cables, the *Washington Post* noted: “The full cable does not strengthen the claim that an accident at the lab caused the virus.”

Notably, Kessler does not cite the fact that the *Post*’s own reporting completely undermines Rogin’s interpretation.

On February 21, 2021, former Deputy National Security Advisor Matthew Pottinger used almost exactly the same talking points as the anonymous source in Rogin’s article in an interview on the CBS program “Face the Nation.”

July 3, 2020— White House trade advisor Peter Navarro tells MSNBC that the “Chinese Communist Party ... spawned the virus” and calls the disease a “weaponized virus.”

June 20, 2020— In a speech in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which Trump admitted to sabotaging US efforts to identify COVID-19 cases (“I said to my people, slow the testing down”), Trump repeatedly refers to SARS-COV-2 as “the Chinese virus” and “Kung Flu.”

September 14, 2020— Li-Meng Yan, a former University of Hong

Kong postdoctoral researcher, publishes a non-peer-reviewed paper alleging COVID-19 is a man-made virus. The paper's title page notes that it is sponsored by the Rule of Law Foundation, which is associated with Miles Guo and Steve Bannon. The paper claims: "SARS-CoV-2 shows biological characteristics that are inconsistent with a naturally occurring, zoonotic virus." It is immediately torn to shreds by scientists.

October 3, 2020 —Bannon declares on his podcast, according to CNN, "I want to thank Miles Guo because it was Miles Guo and the whistleblower movement, Miles Guo and the Rule of Law Society, the Rule of Law Foundation, that back in early January really got us to start to focus" on the claim that the "Chinese communist party" were responsible for the pandemic.

November 20, 2020 —The *New York Times* publishes a devastating and meticulously researched article exposing Li-Meng Yan as the creation of Bannon and Guo Wengui headlined, "How Steve Bannon and a Chinese Billionaire Created a Right-Wing Coronavirus Media Sensation." (Guo Wengui is one of the many aliases of Miles Guo, who is also known as Guo Wen Gui, Guo Haoyun and Miles Kwok.) It is worth quoting at length:

Overnight, Dr. Yan became a right-wing media sensation, with top advisers to President Trump and conservative pundits hailing her as a hero...

Her evolution was the product of a collaboration between two separate but increasingly allied groups that peddle misinformation: a small but active corner of the Chinese diaspora and the highly influential far right in the United States.

An overwhelming body of evidence shows that the virus almost certainly originated in an animal, most likely a bat, before evolving to make the leap into humans. While U.S. intelligence agencies have not ruled out the possibility of a lab leak, they have not found any proof so far to back up that theory.

Dr. Yan's trajectory was carefully crafted by Guo Wengui, a fugitive Chinese billionaire, and Stephen K. Bannon, a former adviser to Mr. Trump.

They put Dr. Yan on a plane to the United States, gave her a place to stay, coached her on media appearances and helped her secure interviews with popular conservative television hosts like Tucker Carlson and Lou Dobbs, who have shows on Fox. They nurtured her seemingly deep belief that the virus was genetically engineered, uncritically embracing what she provided as proof.

Mr. Bannon noted that unlike Dr. Yan, he did not believe the Chinese government "purposely did this." But he has pushed the theory about an accidental leak of risky laboratory research and has been intent on creating a debate about the new coronavirus's origins.

After Dr. Yan arrived in the United States, Mr. Bannon, Mr. Guo and their allies immediately set out to package her as a whistle-blower they could sell to the American public.

They installed her in a "safe house" outside of New York City and hired lawyers, Mr. Bannon said. They found her a media coach, since English is not her first language. Mr. Bannon also asked her to submit multiple papers summarizing her purported evidence, Dr. Yan later said.

"Don't link yourself to Bannon, don't link yourself to Guo Wengui," Mr. Guo on his own show recounted telling Dr. Yan. "Once you mention us, those American extreme leftists will attack and say you have a political agenda."

For the US media, the process of declaring the Wuhan Lab theory "credible" has been the systematic effort to write out of the record the vast amount of evidence making clear that the COVID-19 conspiracy theory was a fabrication from beginning to end.

This has been accompanied by open censorship. When the *World Socialist Web Site* published an article making clear that the *Washington Post* had admitted the US had provided no evidence of the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory, our report was censored by Facebook for two months, and every account that attempted to share it received either a warning or suspension. While Facebook later apologized for what it called a mistake, it made no explanation for how this "mistake" took place.

This reporter has reached out on Twitter to Glenn Kessler why his account excises the reporting of CNN and the *Times* on the central role of Bannon and Guo. Kessler has not responded.

For Donald Trump, the effort to blame China for the pandemic was inseparable from the charge that COVID-19 was a "hoax" (despite the inherent contradiction of these two ideas), his promises that the disease would go away on its own due to what he called "the herd," and his later fascistic claims that the 2020 election was "stolen."

The *Washington Post* and other major news outlets are seeking to fish out of the gutter the claim that COVID-19 was released from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, wash off the explicitly racist filth, and present the theory as somehow fundamentally different and more credible than the other conspiracy theories promoted by Trump's supporters, including QAnon, Pizzagate, and "Jewish space lasers."

In this, they are assisted by CNN, the *Times* and the whole panoply of American corporate media outlets, which have all joined the anti-China chorus. For CNN and the *Times*, the fact that the ultra-right origins of the Wuhan conspiracy theory was exposed months ago does not stop them from embracing that theory today.

The political purpose is clear: to support a key element in American imperialist foreign policy which has not changed one iota in the transition from the Trump administration to the Biden administration. That is the use of increasingly hysterical anti-Chinese propaganda as an essential component of the mobilization of American society for an all-out conflict with China, leading ultimately and logically to a war which could involve the use of nuclear weapons.



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