

Scientists demolish “Wuhan lab” conspiracy theory of coronavirus origins

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On Wednesday, 21 of the world's leading experts on the origins of infectious diseases published a paper demolishing the conspiracy theory promoted by the Biden administration and US newspapers that COVID-19 was a man-made virus.

The paper was written by an international team of biologists and virologists, led by professor Edward Holmes from the University of Sydney and professor Andrew Rambaut from the University of Edinburgh. Among the co-authors are Georgetown University virologist Dr. Angela Rasmussen and Kristian G. Andersen, director of Infectious Disease Genomics at Scripps Research Translational Institute.

The paper summarizes the existing scientific evidence for the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19, concluding it is zoonotic—a transfer from an animal source to humans. The paper, entitled “The Origins of SARS-CoV-2: A Critical Review,” was published as a preprint on Zenodo.

“Our careful and critical analysis of the currently available data provided no evidence for the idea that SARS-CoV-2 originated in a laboratory,” Holmes said.

“There is no evidence that any early cases had any connection to the Wuhan Institute of Virology [WIV] in contrast to the clear epidemiological links to animal markets in Wuhan, nor evidence that the WIV possessed or worked on a progenitor of SARS-CoV-2 prior to the pandemic,” the scientists wrote.

Rather, they argue that “there is substantial body of scientific evidence supporting a zoonotic origin for SARS-CoV-2.”

The “Wuhan Lab” conspiracy theory was originated in January 2020 by the fascist Steve Bannon and his allies among right-wing Chinese expatriates such as Miles Guo, who claimed, in the words of Trump advisor Peter Navarro, that COVID-19 was a “weaponized” virus.

This year, the theory was revised and given a pseudo-

scientific presentation by Nicholas Wade, who, in an article published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, presented a narrative in which US and Chinese scientists created SARS-CoV-2 through “gain of function” experiments at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Wade is infamous for a racist and pseudo-scientific book published in 2014.

Wade’s narrative was embraced by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*, all of which published editorials or major op-eds citing Wade without explaining his background. According to Wade, leading US, Chinese and other international scientists secretly collaborated on “gain of function” research, accidentally released the virus, then covered up the incident so effectively that no evidence of the conspiracy can be found to this day.

The “Wuhan Lab” theory consists of piling speculative leaps on top of one another and claiming they add up to a convincing argument. The scientists’ response takes each of these speculations—for which there is no evidence to begin with—and explains their impossibility.

The paper begins by noting that the transfer of animal diseases to humans has been definitively shown to have caused nearly all previous pandemics. “SARS-CoV-2 is the ninth documented coronavirus that infects humans and the seventh identified in the last 20 years,” it states. “All previous human coronaviruses have zoonotic origins, as have the vast majority of human viruses.”

The paper adds, “The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 bears several signatures of these prior zoonotic events. It displays clear similarities to SARS-CoV that spilled over into humans in Foshan, Guangdong province, China in November 2002, and again in Guangzhou, Guangdong province in 2003.”

The authors further note that the SARS-CoV-2 virus does not resemble any virus that could theoretically be used as a “backbone” to create a new virus. The paper

adds, “Under any laboratory escape scenario SARS-CoV-2 would have to have been present in a laboratory prior to the pandemic, yet no evidence exists to support such a notion and no sequence has been identified that could have served as a precursor.”

The scientists note that while “gain of function” research is typically carried out in laboratory mice, the virus is not well adapted to rodents, indicating that “SARS-CoV-2 is highly unlikely to have been acquired by laboratory workers in the course of viral pathogenesis or gain-of-function experiments.”

The paper adds that, “since its emergence, SARS-CoV-2 has experienced repeated sweeps of mutations that have increased viral fitness,” refuting the claim that COVID-19 was somehow originally optimized to infect humans. “Combined, these findings show that no specific human ‘pre’ adaptation was required for the emergence or early spread of SARS-CoV-2, and the claim that the virus was already highly adapted to the human host... is without validity.”

The scientists conclude, “As for the vast majority of human viruses, the most parsimonious explanation for the origin of SARS-CoV-2 is a zoonotic event... The documented epidemiological history of the virus is comparable to previous animal market-associated outbreaks of coronaviruses with a simple route for human exposure.”

The conclusions of the paper by some of the world’s leading scientists confirm the analysis made by the WSWS, including in a three-part series published last month, “How science demolishes the right-wing fiction of a Wuhan ‘lab leak’ as the source of coronavirus.”

The publication of the paper takes place against the backdrop of a major intensification of the campaign in the US media to blame China for the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Wednesday, the *Washington Post* published an editorial endorsing an official US government investigation into the pandemic. The newspaper, which speaks for dominant sections of the American ruling class, made clear that the focus of the investigation should be not the US government’s criminal response that led to hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths, but an effort to blame China for the pandemic.

“China’s resistance is a lingering obstacle,” the *Post* complained. It alleges that the Chinese government has “initiated a massive campaign of denial, cover-up, diversions, delay and disinformation.”

No, it is Washington that denied the pandemic, covered it up, delayed and spread disinformation. As a result of

the actions of US capitalism, somewhere between 600,000 and one million Americans are dead. If Washington wants to “draw lessons from a global catastrophe,” it should look in the mirror.

Over the past year, documentaries, investigations and witness testimony have made clear that the US government deliberately covered up the spread of the pandemic, allowing it to rapidly spread throughout the country and become massively entrenched by the time the public was even aware of the dangers.

Beginning in April 2020, the Trump administration defied its own public health experts to reopen businesses while the pandemic was still raging, a policy continued and intensified under Biden.

With the resurgence of the pandemic caused by the Delta variant, governments around the world are doubling down on the demand that the population “live with” the COVID-19 pandemic. In the UK, the Johnson government is openly carrying out a policy that it acknowledges will lead to a surge of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths. But the Johnson government is only expressing in more developed form the policy of every capitalist government, which aims to sacrifice human lives to the protection of corporate profits.

The Wuhan Lab theory has never been a real “theory,” in the sense of a scientific explanation rooted in empirical evidence. It is a “theory” driven by purely political considerations: to deflect attention from those responsible, to justify the continuation of a policy that has led to millions of deaths and to serve as ammunition in the geopolitical conflict with China.

But the efforts to blame China for deaths caused by the insatiable greed and sociopathic tendencies of American capitalism will be treated by working people the world over with scorn. Workers in the United States and internationally, as they enter into struggle in defense of their lives and livelihoods, will put the blame where it belongs: on the ruling class and the capitalist system it defends.



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