

# Promoters of “Wuhan lab” conspiracy theory fume as their claims fall apart

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8 December 2021

On Sunday, journalist Glenn Greenwald published an article accusing the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* of being insufficiently faithful to the conspiracy theory that SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, originated in a Chinese laboratory.

Greenwald has for months promoted the conspiracy theory on Twitter, sharing talking points with fascists such as Steve Bannon, Raheem Kassam and the right-wing Fox News personality Tucker Carlson.

But Greenwald is only one of the many figures previously associated with opposition to the Iraq war who have embraced the “lab leak” conspiracy theory that is central to US war drive against China. “Stop with the ... logic,” raved comedian Jon Stewart in June, as he proclaimed that the COVID-19 pandemic was “caused by science.” Bill Maher, the former Iraq war critic, has likewise promoted the conspiracy theory.

But just as these figures have been drawn to the US government’s right-wing campaign against China, they have been equally taken aback as the lies they embraced have fallen apart amid major new scientific discoveries and the determination by scientists to resist a right-wing campaign to scapegoat them for the pandemic.

In his Substack article this weekend, Greenwald alleges that on November 18, the *New York Times* published an article that was “designed to affirm the claim that evidence had once again emerged showing that COVID was naturally occurring.”

The problem for Greenwald, however, is not of the *Times*’ making. The *Times* did not “design” its report to disprove Greenwald’s conspiracy theory. Rather, the groundbreaking research the *Times* reported and the statements of the scientist that conducted it themselves strike a massive blow against it.

The peer-reviewed article reported by the *Times*, published in *Science* by biologist Michael Worobey, demonstrated that the first individual currently known to have contracted COVID-19 was in fact a vendor at the Huanan seafood and wildlife market, not an accountant

unconnected with the market, as had previously been believed.

Worobey showed that the majority of COVID-19 patients from the original outbreak had a direct connection to the market, not a minority, as scientists had previously thought. These findings were “yet another piece of data that points to the so-called ‘natural’ origin in the wildlife farms and market system,” a source close to the World Health Organization (WHO)-China joint study on the origins of COVID-19 told the WWSW at the time.

Moreover, Worobey condemned “anti-scientific comments” by proponents of the lab leak “theory” and their “desire to downplay, denigrate, or dismiss evidence that doesn’t suit the desires of advocates of a particular hypothesis.”

For a response to Worobey’s findings, the *Times* quoted, among others, EcoHealth Alliance President Peter Daszak. In addition to his status as an expert on the origins of coronaviruses, Daszak was a member of the WHO inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, which concluded that a laboratory origin of COVID-19 was “extremely unlikely.”

But most significant of all, Daszak is the most prominent scientific voice who has denounced claims of a laboratory origin of COVID-19 as a “conspiracy theory” and an “anti-science attack”—statements that are substantiated by Worobey’s findings.

According to Greenwald, however, it is inappropriate to cite Daszak, whom Greenwald accuses of being a “discredited, conflict-plagued scientist” whose credentials are besmirched by “conflicts of interest and repeated deceit and even lying.”

Greenwald writes, “To say that Daszak had a gigantic but undisclosed conflict of interest in disseminating this narrative about the natural origins of COVID is to understate the case.”

Greenwald, who calls himself a civil libertarian, claims citing Daszak is inappropriate because he has an interest in defending himself from accusations that he personally created the deadliest pandemic of the past half-century.

Citing him is doubly inappropriate because he has, in the past, expressed opinions on the validity of the accusations against him.

Greenwald is not seeking to convince an impartial observer on the basis of the strength of his arguments but merely to appeal to fascistic prejudices. An evaluation of his methods was proved by virologist Angela Rasmussen:

Looks like old Glenn finally deduced that parroting lab leak twitter's greatest hits of the last 2 years' worth of sleuthing would score some substack clicks but [that] doesn't mean his analysis is original, informative, or true.

More significant than the re-hash of allegations against Daszak leveled by Greenwald is his central argument: That, in reporting new scientific findings, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* “designed” to undermine the Wuhan lab theory.

The reality is quite the opposite. The *Times* and *Post* have invested significant political capital in promoting the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, and its implosion carries significant reputational damage to both newspapers. The newspapers published innumerable op-eds, editorials and “fact-checker” columns backing the claims of the conspiracy theorists and arguing that the lab leak theory is “plausible.”

No doubt over the objections of at least some editors, the *Times* opinion page allowed the right-wing columnists Ross Douhat and Bret Stephens to cite lab leak advocate Nicholas Wade, the racist and serial fabricator, without explaining his record of falsifying science to promote anti-Semitic viewpoints.

After the *World Socialist Web Site* brought attention to Wade's racist claims and falsification of science, the *Times* articles stopped citing him uncritically. But that did not stop *Times* columnist Zeynep Tufekci from reusing Wade's arguments and directly linking to his sources, all without attribution, as documented by the WSWWS.

As for the *Washington Post*, it has staked even more on the conspiracy theory. It was the *Post* that declared the “lab leak” theory “credible” in a “fact-checker” article published on May 25. The *Post* published this column just two days after Michael R. Gordon, author of the discredited *Times* article that helped launch the Iraq war, reported claims by unnamed US officials that scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick in 2019.

Then the *Post* revised the headline of a February 2020 article, entitled “[Tom] Cotton keeps repeating a coronavirus conspiracy theory that was already debunked,” declaring,

“The term ‘debunked’ and The Post’s use of ‘conspiracy theory’ have been removed because, then as now, there was no determination about the origins of the virus.”

Most significant of all, in October the *Post* published an editorial entitled, “Question Mr. Daszak: He might know what really happened in Wuhan,” which demanded “efforts must be made to discover whether a laboratory release or infection led to the pandemic.”

The effort to legitimize the Wuhan lab hoax and the witch-hunt against Daszak has been demolished by a series of scientific breakthroughs, of which Worobey's findings are only the latest. In September, scientists discovered a set of viruses in Laos that have receptor-binding domains that are closer to that of the wild-type SARS-CoV-2 than that of its variants. That same month, Daszak and other scientists published new evidence that SARS-like coronaviruses are constantly spilling over into the human population throughout Asia.

If the *Times* and the *Post* are now forced to write on these breakthroughs, it is in recognition that the conspiracy theory they have promoted has collapsed. This is what drives Greenwald's unhinged vituperation at Daszak.

Greenwald, previously a critic of American imperialism, reveals himself to be the foremost advocate of the plots and conspiracies of Washington, no matter how filthy or discredited.

Earlier this year, Greenwald demanded COVID-19 policies that “will kill people,” claiming that the public is putting insufficient emphasis on the “costs” of saving lives. Just as Greenwald's demands were an even more brutal formulation of the homicidal policy of the US political establishment, so, too, in this case, Greenwald's criticism of the US media revolves around the claim that it does not promote a right-wing lie, a central aim of which is to justify a US military buildup against China, with sufficient conviction.

But Greenwald can fume all he wants. A lie is still a lie, and the truth is still the truth. The filthy campaign to besmirch the names of scientists that have devoted their lives to the study of infectious diseases, and who sought to warn society of the dangers they pose, has fallen apart.

Everyone who promoted it will be permanently discredited by their shameful actions.



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