

Journalist who promoted false Iraqi WMDs narrative now endorses claims that Chinese researchers were first COVID-19 patients

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On Tuesday, Michael R. Gordon, who helped launch the Iraq war by promoting Bush administration allegations that Saddam Hussein was using aluminum tubes to build nuclear weapons, claimed, citing anonymous government sources, that world-renowned researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology were among the first people to be infected with COVID-19.

Gordon's article, published in the *Wall Street Journal*, serves to lend credibility to the conspiracy theory, invented by the fascist ideologue Stephen K. Bannon and his wealthy Chinese anti-communist associates, that scientists at the Wuhan Institute of Virology created COVID-19.

Like Gordon's earlier reporting, this is, in the words of the late *Consortium News* journalist Robert Parry, a "Michael Gordon Special," using alleged statements by anonymous government officials to promote completely false claims in line with US foreign policy.

Gordon has perfected the technique of endowing what are essentially baseless claims, unsupported by established facts, with an aura of credibility. In his latest article, he writes:

"A prominent scientist who worked on coronavirus projects funded by the U.S. government is one of three Chinese researchers who became sick with an unspecified illness during the initial outbreak of Covid-19, according to current and former U.S. officials."

What is the "unspecified illness"? Gordon does not answer this question. He writes that the "nature of their illness hasn't been conclusively established." As for the nature of the unidentified illness, Gordon reports that its symptoms, according to unnamed American officials, "were consistent with either Covid-19 or a

seasonal illness."

In other words, even if one were to accept the unproven claim that any of the researchers were actually ill, they may have been suffering from nothing more serious than the common cold.

Gordon's article strings together a host of unsubstantiated claims by unnamed government officials to lend credibility to a fictional narrative.

The claims by Gordon served to "confirm" the naming of the researchers by Substack writers Michael Shellenberger and Matt Taibbi, who called the researchers "patients zero," that is, the patients who first contracted COVID. The reporting by Shellenberger and Taibbi built on claims made by Gordon in 2021 about researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology falling ill.

The researchers named by Gordon, Shellenberger, and Matt Taibbi were Ben Hu, Yu Ping, and Yan Zhu, all of whom were close collaborators with Shi Zhengli, the world-renowned scientist who discovered that bats are the natural reservoir of SARS-like coronaviruses.

Hu remains a leading figure at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, carrying on communication with his international scientific collaborators during the pandemic. Neither of the three researchers have ever publicly said that they had been sickened with COVID-19.

The "reporting" by Gordon, Taibbi, and Shellenberger serves to preemptively leak public statements expected to be made by Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines this week, with the aim of presenting a mutually reinforcing narrative between the government and the media.

Taibbi, ironically, expertly described this process in

his 2019 book, *Hate Inc.*

The war-makers left another clue lying out in the open, through a process muckraker Seymour Hersh called “The Stovepipe.”

The idea of “stovepiping” involved top officials obtaining access to raw intelligence data submerged in bureaucracies, and withdrawing it before the various compliance officers could get hands on it. “Their position,” wrote Hersh, “is that the professional bureaucracy is deliberately and maliciously keeping information from them.”

The “stovepiping” technique gave people like Dick Cheney access to nuggets like the idea Saddam had been purchasing aluminum tubes, without having to hear the objections of bureaucratic naysayers about whether or not that meant anything nefarious (or whether the information was even true).

In this way, information somehow made it past internal controls to *New York Times* reporters Michael Gordon and Judith Miller, one of whom is still in the business, one of whom is not. On September 7, 2002, they wrote a crucial article, “U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts,” that declared, “Iraq has stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons.”

Cheney infamously went on Meet the Press that same day and cited the article, saying, “it was public knowledge” Hussein was “trying to build a bomb.”

In similar fashion, the “scoops” by Gordon, Taibbi, and Shellenberger are expected to prepare public opinion for the information to be released by the DNI Haines this week.

On March 1, Josh Hawley, the senator who raised his fist up in support of insurrectionists who attacked the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, introduced the “COVID-19 Origin Act of 2023.”

The act asserted, contrary to established scientific consensus, that “there is reason to believe the COVID-19 pandemic may have originated at the

Wuhan Institute of Virology.”

The fascist senator’s bill, basing itself on Gordon’s earlier reporting, declared that “the Director of National Intelligence should declassify and make available to the public as much information as possible about the origin of COVID-19,” specifically demanding to know the names of “researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology who fell ill in autumn 2019...”

This implicit endorsement of Bannon’s conspiracy theory was approved unanimously by every single Democrat and Republican in Congress. It then made its way to the desk of President Joe Biden, who promptly signed it, declaring, “Today, I am pleased to sign into law S. 619, the ‘COVID-19 Origin Act of 2023.’”

The signing of this bill followed the open endorsement of the conspiracy theory by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). On February 28, FBI director Christopher Wray publicly asserted that “the origins of the [COVID-19] pandemic are most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan.”

As with Gordon’s earlier discredited reporting about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction,” which helped pave the way to the US invasion, the aim of the present campaign is to justify the US military buildup against China, which threatens to erupt into a full-scale war.

All workers and young people must reject the racist lies being promoted by the Biden administration and US media to scapegoat China and leading scientists for the deaths of over 1 million Americans from COVID-19—deaths that are attributable to the subordination of public health to private profit under both Trump and Biden.



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