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The Dam of Lies Surrounding COVID Lab Leak Is Breaking

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola Fact Checked | February 02, 2023

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In January 2022, House Oversight Committee Republicans released a batch of emails sent to and from the National Institutes of Health. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit brought by Jimmy Tobias at The Intercept also forced the release of unredacted NIH correspondence
- The emails reveal there was great concern among NIH leadership, as SARS-CoV-2 appeared to be a genetically engineered virus that somehow escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China
- The emails show they were nervous about the possibility that they'd funded the creation of this virus, and that they were determined to suppress questions about its origin
- A group of scientists convened by Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, published a paper in which they claimed the virus was decidedly not the result of intentional engineering. They did admit accidental creation in a lab could not be ruled out, but that natural evolution was the most likely scenario. Some of these same scientists had previously shared details indicative of genetic engineering in emails to Fauci
- The "Proximal Origin" paper, which was edited by Fauci and "debunked" the lab leak theory without any evidence, became the most-read published paper in history. More than 2,000 media outlets have cited it to support their propaganda

In January 2022, House Oversight Committee Republicans released a batch of emails sent to and from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).[1,2,3] A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit brought by Jimmy Tobias at The Intercept[4] also forced the release of

unredacted NIH correspondence in late November 2022, just as Dr. Anthony Fauci prepared to retire from his position as director of the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

The emails reveal what many had suspected all along, namely that SARS-CoV-2 appeared to be a genetically engineered virus that somehow escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China. (In a January 17, 2023, Twitter thread,[5] molecular biologist Richard Ebright, Ph.D., summarized the lab-origin hypothesis.)

The correspondence also reveal that a) NIH leaders were nervous about the possibility that they'd funded the creation of this virus, and b) they were determined to suppress questions about its origin.

Summary of Key Findings

As reported by the House Oversight Committee:[6]

> *"Excerpts of emails released today reveal the following:*
>
> - *January 27, 2020: Dr. [Anthony] Fauci knew NIAID [National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases] had funded EcoHealth Alliance, the WIV was a subgrantee of EcoHealth, and EcoHealth was not in compliance with its grant reporting, in particular a grant that NIAID knew had gain-of-function potential on novel bat coronaviruses.*
> - *February 1, 2020: Dr. Fauci, [then-NIH director] Dr. [Francis] Collins, and at least eleven other scientists convened a conference call to discuss COVID-19. On the conference call, Drs. Fauci and Collins were first warned that COVID-19 may have leaked from the WIV and may have been intentionally genetically manipulated.*
> - *February 4, 2020: After speaking with Drs. Fauci and Collins, four participants of the conference call abandoned their belief the virus originated from the Wuhan lab and authored a paper[7] entitled 'The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2.' Prior to final publication in Nature Medicine, the paper was sent to Dr. Fauci for editing and approval.*

- *April 16, 2020: More than two months after the original conference call, Dr. Collins emailed Dr. Fauci expressing dismay that the Nature Medicine article — which they saw prior to publication and were given the opportunity to edit — did not squash the lab leak hypothesis and asks if the NIH can do more to 'put down' the lab leak hypothesis.*
- *April 17, 2020: After Dr. Collins explicitly asked for more public pressure, Dr. Fauci cited the Nature Medicine paper from the White House podium likely in an effort to further stifle the hypothesis COVID-19 leaked from the Wuhan lab."*

Fauci Tipped Off About Lab Leak Possibility

January 31, 2020, Fauci received an email from Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, asking him to call Kristian Andersen, Ph.D., an evolutionary biologist and professor in the department of immunology and microbiology at the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California. As reported by The Intercept January 19, 2023:[8]

> *"Fauci had his phone call with Andersen that night, and what he heard clearly disturbed him. In an email to Farrar after the call, he wrote the following:*
>
> *'I told [Andersen] that as soon as possible he and Eddie Holmes should get a group of evolutionary biologists together to examine carefully the data to determine if his concerns are validated. He should do this very quickly and if everyone agrees with this concern, they should report it to the appropriate authorities.*
>
> *I would imagine that in the USA this would be the FBI and in the UK it would be MI5' … What were Andersen's concerns? And why were they so dire they might merit a call to the FBI?*
>
> *Andersen laid them out plainly in an email to Fauci that same evening. 'The unusual features of the virus make up a really small part of the genome (<0.1%)*

so one has to look really closely at all the sequences to see that some of the features (potentially) look engineered,' Andersen wrote in the email.

'I should mention,' he added, 'that after discussions earlier today, Eddie, Bob, Mike and myself all find the genome inconsistent with expectations from evolutionary theory. But we have to look at this much more closely and there are still further analyses to be done, so those opinions could still change.'"

NIH Funded Risky Research at the WIV

The following day, February 1, 2020, at 2 p.m., Fauci, Farrar, Collins, Andersen and several other virologists had their conference call, and Andersen clearly wasn't the only one who had noticed tell-tale signs of genetic engineering. Farrar himself wrote "On a spectrum if 0 is nature and 100 is release — I am honestly at 50!" [9]

According to The Intercept,[10] Fauci spent that morning "brushing up on what sorts of grants and collaborations his agency was involved in with research institutions in China."

In all likelihood, he discovered (if he was somehow previously unaware, which seems doubtful) that the NIH had provided research grants to the EcoHealth Alliance, which in turn subcontracted coronavirus experiments to the WIV — including an experiment involving humanized mice that were infected with chimeric hybrids of SARS-related bat coronaviruses.[11]

According to The Intercept, it's highly unlikely that these experiments resulted in SARS-CoV-2, as the viruses are too dissimilar, "but it does raise questions about what other kinds of experiments were going on in Wuhan and haven't been disclosed."

NIH-Linked Scientists Suspected Lab Leak From the Start

February 2, 2020, Farrar circulated a set of notes summarizing the discussion, which he said was to be treated "in total confidence."[12] Michael (Mike) Farzan, Ph.D., an expert on the entry processes of enveloped viruses, was bothered by the presence of a furin

cleavage site — a novel feature that allows SARS-CoV-2 the ability to infect cells in the human airways.

According to Farrar's note, Farzan "has a hard time explain[ing] that as an event outside the lab." Farrar's summary goes on to state that:[13]

> *"… the likely explanation could be something as simple as passage SARS-live CoVs in tissue culture on human cell lines (under BSL-2) for an extended period of time, accidentally creating a virus that would be primed for rapid transmission between humans via gain of furin site (from tissue culture) and adoption to human ACE2 receptor via repeated passage …*
>
> *So, I think it becomes a question of how do you put all this together, whether you believe in this series of coincidences, what you know of the lab in Wuhan, how much could be in nature — accidental release or natural event? I am 70:30 or 60:40."*

A note from professor and microbiologist Robert (Bob) Garry, Ph.D.,[14] reveals he had similar concerns:

> *"… I aligned the nCoV with the 96% bat CoV sequenced at WIV. Except for the RBD [receptor binding domain] the S proteins are essential [sic] identical at the amino acid level — well all but the perfect insertion of 12 nucleotides that adds [sic] the furin site.*
>
> *S2 is over its whole length essentially identical. I really can't think of a plausible natural scenario where you get from the bat virus or one very similar to it to nCoV where you insert exactly 4 amino acids 12 nucleotide [sic] that all have to be added at the exact same time to gain this function — that and you don't change any other amino acids in S2?*
>
> *I just can't figure out how this gets accomplished in nature. Do the alignment of the spikes at the amino acid level — its [sic] stunning. Of course, in the lab it would be easy to generate the perfect 12 base insert that you wanted.*

> *Another scenario is that the progenitor of nCoV was a bat virus with the perfect furin cleavage site generated over evolutionary times. In this scenario RaTG13 the WIV virus was generated by a perfect deletion of 12 nucleotides while essentially not changing any other S2 amino acid [sic]. Even more implausible IMO [in my opinion]. That is the big if."*

In other words, in the earliest days of the pandemic, the general consensus among virologists in communication with the NIH was that a WIV lab leak was not only plausible, but perhaps the most likely. The correspondence also leaves no doubt about the fact that Fauci and Collins wanted to silence this theory.

The Cover-Up Begins

In a February 2, 2020, email, Collins stated that he was "coming around to the view that a natural origin is more likely," and warned that "voices of conspiracy will quickly dominate" lest they convene a panel of experts to address the matter, and that such conspiracies could do "great potential harm to science and international harmony."

Dutch virologist Ron Fouchier, who participated in the call, also warned his colleagues that continuing the discussion about a lab leak "would unnecessarily distract top researchers from their active duties and do unnecessary harm to science in general and science in China in particular."[15]

Fauci, for his part, appears to have made the decision to suppress the lab leak theory that same day (February 2). In an email, he wrote:[16]

> *"Like all of us, I do not know how this evolved, but given the concerns of so many people and the threat of further distortions on social media, it is essential that we move quickly."*

According to The Intercept, Fauci, Farrar and Collins alerted officials at the World Health Organization in the hopes they'd convene an expert panel to investigate, but "WHO apparently declined to do so at the time." The group was well aware of the risks involved,

though, were the lab leak theory to gain legs, so a plan to discourage further "accusations" was apparently hatched.

Hastily Written Paper Sought to Discourage Bioweapon Idea

Just two days later, on February 4, 2020, Fauci and Collins received the first draft of the article, "The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2," later published in Nature Medicine.[17]

Three of the authors, Andersen, Robert Garry of Tulane University and Edward Holmes of the University of Sydney, were on the February 1, 2020, conference call. Andersen, Garry, and another "Proximal Origin" author, W. Ian Lipkin of Columbia University, have also received large NIH grants in recent years,[18] so this paper was not written by uninterested and independent parties.

The original draft is still secret. All we have is an email reply from Fauci, in which he appears to flag the inclusion of serial passage through humanized mice. This suggests the issue of animal passage was raised, but then immediately scrapped.

The Nature Medicine article roundly dismissed the idea that the virus was the result of deliberate engineering, proposing instead that, despite a dearth of evidence, it most likely evolved naturally. (Two potential natural-evolution theories were described.) They didn't conclusively dismiss the possibility of a lab leak, though — only the idea that it was "deliberately" engineered. As noted in the paper:[19]

> *"Although the evidence shows that SARS-CoV-2 is not a purposefully manipulated virus, it is currently impossible to prove or disprove the other theories of its origin described here.*
>
> *However, since we observed all notable SARS-CoV-2 features, including the optimized RBD and polybasic cleavage site, in related coronaviruses in nature, we do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible."*

Lab Origin Was Never Ruled Out

The "other theories of its origin" described in the "Proximal Origin" paper was the possibility that it might have been the result of "selection during passage," which is a routine laboratory practice. In other words, it seems they were most concerned with dispelling any rumors about it being intentionally created, which would place it in the category of a bioweapon.

As reported by The Intercept, Farrar, Fauci and Collins certainly had not ruled out the possibility of a lab origin altogether:[20]

> *"The scientists seem by this point to have made a sharp distinction between a scenario in which the virus was deliberately engineered in a lab and a scenario in which the virus was generated during serial passage experiments in a lab.*
>
> *'Eddie would be 60:40 lab side,' Farrar added. 'I remain 50:50.'*
>
> *'Yes, I'd be interested in the proposal of accidental lab passage in animals (which ones?),' Collins wrote.*
>
> *'?? Serial passage in ACE2-transgenic mice,' Fauci responded.*
>
> *'Exactly!' Farrar replied.*
>
> *'Surely that wouldn't be done in a BSL-2 lab?' wrote Collins, referring to biosafety level 2 labs, which do not have the most stringent safety protocols.*
>
> *'Wild West…' was Farrar's response, an apparent reference to lab practices in China or possibly to the Wuhan Institute of Virology itself.*
>
> *In the above exchange, the health officials seem to be contemplating the possibility that the repeated passage of a coronavirus through genetically modified mice in an insufficiently secure lab could have resulted in the accidental emergence and release of SARS-CoV-2.*
>
> *In a later email exchange, Farrar, quoting Garry, noted that serial passage in animals had been proved to result in the appearance of furin cleavage sites in*

> *other viruses, specifically the H5N1 flu virus. 'There are a couple passage of H5N1 in chicken papers — the furin site appears in steps.'"*

Similarly, there's this exchange between Christian Drosten, Ph.D., and Andersen on February 8.[21] Drosten wrote:

> *"Can someone help me with one question: didn't we congregate to challenge a certain theory, and if we could, drop it? Who came up with this story in the beginning? Are we working on debunking our own conspiracy theory?"*

Andersen's reply read:

> *"Our main work over the last couple of weeks has been focused on trying to disprove any type of lab theory, but we are at a crossroad where the scientific evidence isn't conclusive enough to say that we have high confidence in any of the three main theories considered.*
>
> *As to publishing this document in a journal, I am currently not in favor of doing so. I believe that publishing something that is open-ended could backfire at this stage."*

Andersen's reluctance notwithstanding, the paper was accepted for publication a month later, March 17, 2020 — and the possibility of the virus being the result of serial passage remained.

Most-Read Propaganda Paper Ever

The influence of the "Proximal Origin" paper cannot be overstated. As reported by The Intercept,[22] it's been accessed more than 5.7 million times and cited by more than 2,000 media outlets, making it one of the most-read papers ever published. It's fair to say this propaganda piece was "milked for all its worth" to uphold the illusion of a natural evolution consensus.

Most media outlets also overstated the paper's conclusion. While it did not present any actual evidence to support the natural evolution theory, and admitted it might have been created through serial passaging in a lab, outlets like ABC News boldly declared, "Sorry, Conspiracy Theorists. Study Concludes COVID-19 'Is Not a Laboratory Construct,'"[23] as if the issue had been conclusively settled based on the scientific evidence at hand.

Questions Could Not Be Quelled

The Nature Medicine article didn't stem the flow of questions, though, a fact decried by Collins in a mid-April 2020 email to Fauci:

> *"Wondering if there is something NIH can do to help put down this very destructive conspiracy, with what seems to be growing momentum … I hoped the Nature Medicine article on the genomic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 would settle this. But probably didn't get much visibility. Anything more we can do? Ask the National Academy to weigh in?"*

Fauci replied, "I would not do anything about this right now. It is a shiny object that will go away in times [sic]." He was wrong, of course, and the reason questions didn't go away was because emerging evidence kept strengthening the lab leak theory, while there is nothing with which to support natural evolution.

As Sergei Pond, a computational virologist at Temple University, told The Intercept,[24] "there was no data then, and there is no data now, that would definitively indicate that a lab origin like the one contemplated in 'Proximal Origin' is not at least plausible."

Having read the unredacted emails, David Relman, a professor of microbiology, immunology and medicine at Stanford University, added:[25]

> *"When I first saw it [the Proximal Origin paper] in March 2020, the paper read to me as a conclusion in search of an argument. Among its many problems, it failed to consider in a serious fashion the possibility of an unwitting and unrecognized accidental leak during aggressive efforts to grow coronaviruses from bat and other field samples.*

It also assumed that researchers in Wuhan have told the world about every virus and every sequence that was in their laboratories in 2019. But these [unredacted emails] actually provide evidence that the authors considered a few additional lab-associated scenarios, early in their discussions.

But then they rushed to judgment, and the lab scenarios fell out of favor. It appears as if a combination of a scant amount of data and an unspoken bias against the [lab origin] scenario diminished the idea in their minds."

Virologists Under the Microscope

As reported by The Washington Post,[26] virologists are now under the microscope like never before, and the NIH is said to be "preparing an overhaul of the policies on government-funded research." Draft recommendations[27] from the biosecurity advisory board were released January 20, 2023.

Clearly, paranoia is high, and there's good reason for that. Not only do we have the unredacted NIH emails showing there were grave concerns about COVID-19 being the result of a lab leak, and that those concerns were "allayed" by passing propaganda for "science," but researchers have also published research showing they're now conducting gain-of-function research on SARS-CoV-2.[28]

> **“ If gain-of-function research contributed to COVID-19, then clearly we need to make sure it cannot happen again.”**

Who in their right mind would think that was a good idea? The fact that reckless dual-use research into dangerous pathogens is taking place on the daily is precisely why getting to the bottom of the origin of SARS-CoV-2 is so important. If this kind of research contributed to COVID-19, then clearly we need to make sure it cannot happen again.

I believe one of the primary reasons why the lab leak theory is being so heavily disputed is because acknowledging it as true would force Congress to rein in the research industry. But we cannot afford to ignore it, because gain-of-function research capabilities pose a truly existential threat to mankind as a whole.[29]

Inspector General Report Blasts NIH for String of Errors

Interestingly, January 25, 2023, the U.S. Office of Inspector General released a report[30] detailing the NIH's failure to properly monitor and review potentially hazardous coronavirus research. As reported by the Daily Mail:[31]

> *"EcoHealth Alliance was awarded $8 million in Government research grants between 2014 and 2021, which it subcontracted to research facilities. The WIV was one of eight teams awarded grants at that time.*
>
> *Today's audit said there was a lack of oversight by the NIH and EcoHealth at the Chinese facility and other labs that benefitted from Government grants.*
>
> *The report said: 'Despite identifying potential risks associated with research being performed under the EcoHealth awards, we found that NIH did not effectively monitor or take timely action to address EcoHealth's compliance with some requirements.*
>
> *'Although NIH and EcoHealth had established monitoring procedures, we found deficiencies in complying with those procedures limited NIH and EcoHealth's ability to effectively monitor federal grant awards and subawards to understand the nature of the research conducted, identify potential problem areas, and take corrective action' …*
>
> *Investigators say EcoHealth also did not submit proper progress reports on the use of its fund in a timely manner, with information coming in two years late. It also says the NIH failed to terminate its grant with EcoHealth after the non-profit broke protocols."*

Justin Goodman, senior vice president of Advocacy and Public Policy at the White Coat Waste Project commented on the report:[32]

> *"This audit confirms what we have been documenting since early 2020 when we first exposed NIH's funding of the Wuhan lab: EcoHealth Alliance shipped tax dollars to Wuhan for dangerous animal experiments that probably caused the pandemic, violated federal laws and policies and wasted tax dollars.*
>
> *Yet, the Wuhan lab remains eligible for even more taxpayer money for animal tests and just since the pandemic began, EcoHealth has raked in at least $46million in new federal funds from the DOD, USAID, NIH, and NSF.*
>
> *As the group that first exposed and ended EcoHealth's calamitous collaboration with the Wuhan animal lab, we're calling on Congress to defund these rogue organizations once and for all. Taxpayers should not be forced to bankroll reckless white coats who waste money, break the law and place public health in peril. Stop the money, stop the madness."*

US Government Stonewalls FOIA Requests

As investigators try to get to the truth, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is doing everything it can to prevent it from coming out. As reported by Gary Ruskin,[33] executive director and co-founder of U.S. Right to Know (USRTK), in 2022, as the HHS was slammed with FOIA requests relating to COVID-19, they added four extra layers of legal review within the HHS legal department.

These attorneys scoured each and every document to make sure anything potentially incriminating was properly redacted before release. "This plainly appears to be an effort to delay or block release of documents about the origin of COVID-19," Ruskin wrote. "What is HHS hiding? We hope Congress will investigate."

The good news is, the Republican House now has the ability to launch such investigations, and I hope they will. The problem is that it would be dangerous to prove a cover-up, as it would turn everything upside-down. Health agencies, universities and any

number of other agencies would have to be retooled. So, getting to the bottom of this affair will require people who believe the truth is worth the pain.

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