

The CIA joins the anti-China bandwagon on COVID origins, despite lack of any evidence

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In one of his first actions after being confirmed by the Senate as CIA director—by a bipartisan vote of 74-25—John Ratcliffe, a former Republican congressman and Director of National Intelligence in Trump’s first term, released a “reassessment” of the origins of COVID-19 intended to support the fascist-inspired conspiracy theory that China created the SARS-CoV-2 virus at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) and then unleashed it on the world.

The “reassessment” was actually carried out by the agency at the instruction of Biden’s CIA Director William J. Burns, but the results were not made public until Ratcliffe gave the instruction.

Amid mounting demands last year from both Democratic and Republican politicians that the COVID-19 origins issue should be used as a weapon against China, Burns told CIA analysts that they had to drop the previous stance of the military-intelligence apparatus—that there was not enough evidence to decide whether COVID was of natural or man-made origin—and come down on the side of the lab leak.

Both the initial claim that the evidence is inconclusive and the current claim that the evidence slightly favors the lab leak “hypothesis” are political rather than science-based. This is demonstrated not only by the enormous weight of scientific research documenting the natural origin of the virus, but by the fact that the CIA changed its official position without adducing any new evidence.

The shift was to prepare a stepped-up campaign by US imperialism against China, whether conducted by Kamala Harris, as Burns hoped, or now by the Trump-Vance administration, with Ratcliffe acting as its agent.

The threadbare nature of the new anti-China “finding” was indicated in the email sent to the media on Saturday. An unnamed CIA spokesperson wrote, “We have low confidence in this judgement and will continue to evaluate any available credible new intelligence reporting or open-source information that could change CIA’s assessment.” The intelligence agency said its analysts were not acting in response to Ratcliffe’s strongly held position on the lab leak question, and that the assessment on the origins of COVID had been ongoing.

Ratcliffe, speaking with *Breitbart News*, the fascistic online publication with which Steven Bannon was once associated, said:

I know from conversations with the president about

where his priorities are and where he wants things to be as it concerns foreign threats to America’s national security posture, and it starts with China. One of the things that I’ve talked about a lot is addressing the threat from China on a number of fronts, and that goes back to why a million Americans died and why the Central Intelligence Agency has been sitting on the sidelines for five years in not making an assessment about the origins of COVID.

That’s a day-one thing for me. I’ve been on record as you know in saying I think our intelligence, our science, and our common sense all really dictates that the origins of COVID was a leak at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. But the CIA has not made that assessment or at least not made that assessment publicly. So, I’m going to focus on that and look at the intelligence and make sure that the public is aware that the agency is going to get off the sidelines.

In July, at a Heritage Foundation conference on COVID origins, Ratcliffe was openly critical of the intelligence community and claimed the indecision by the agencies reflected “political and financial considerations.”

Republican Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, a rabid anti-China hawk, commended Ratcliffe Saturday for declassifying the assessment, saying he was “[pleased] the CIA concluded in the final days of the Biden administration that the lab-leak theory is the most plausible explanation. Now, the most important things are to make China pay for unleashing a plague on the world.” These words are essentially a declaration for an open war with the nuclear-armed country.

The natural origin of the COVID pandemic, at the Huanan Seafood market in Wuhan, remains the only convincing explanation of the pandemic and is supported by the scientific evidence that has emerged over the last five years. The lab-leak conspiracy theory, by contrast, was cooked up by Chinese expatriate anti-communists allied with Bannon, and given pseudo-scientific cover by the former science editor of the *New York Times*, Nicholas Wade, and other equally disreputable characters.

There is no scientific basis for the lab-leak conspiracy. As *Politico* wrote in response to the shift in the CIA’s position, “The statement didn’t include any additional details about what led the agency to change its assessment and whether it had intelligence that would add weight to the theory that the virus had

leaked from a research lab in Wuhan, China.”

The *Times* added:

There is no new intelligence behind the agency’s shift, officials said. Rather it is based on the same evidence it has been chewing over for months. The analysis, however, is based in part on a closer look at the conditions in the high security labs in Wuhan province before the pandemic outbreak, according to people familiar with the agency’s work. A spokeswoman for the agency said the other theory [of a natural origin] remains plausible and that the agency will continue to evaluate any available credible new intelligence reporting.

Three of the 19 US intelligence agencies have now lined up behind Bannon and Trump’s promotion of the big lie against China, including the Department of Energy (which characterized its judgment as one of low confidence) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (moderate confidence). Other intelligence agencies are likely to fall in line as the pressure grows from the Trump White House and the Pentagon, now headed by the fascist Pete Hegseth, another anti-China warhawk.

According to the June 2023 Office of Director of National Intelligence report, the National Intelligence Council and four other intelligence community agencies stood by the assessment that the initial human infections with SARS-CoV-2 were most likely through exposure to an infected animal.

That report is worth noting, since its authors can hardly be accused of a pro-China bias, yet they dismiss the unfounded claims of the fascist right and conceded that the pandemic began as a zoonotic event and not a lab leak. They don’t attribute any nefarious designs to the involvement of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at the WIV, admitting that much of the collaborative work between the civilian research institute founded in 1950 and the military was on research related to public health and collaborations on biosecurity and biosafety projects. They also concede that in the United States such relationships between researchers and the military are commonplace.

Neither did the critical coronavirus research being conducted at the WIV raise any flags. The report states that the intelligence community “has no information indicating that any WIV genetic engineering work has involved SARS-CoV-2, a close progenitor, or a backbone virus that is closely-related enough to have been the source of the pandemic.”

The American ultra-right claimed that the SARS-CoV-2 was a “chimeric construct,” in which spike proteins and furin cleavage sites were added through genetic engineering to an already known viral backbone. This was malicious distortion of the ABCs of viral research which sought to take advantage of public lack of understanding of scientific complexities.

Much of this misunderstanding has been encouraged by the corporate media which has given wide publicity to those within the intelligence community and political establishment who have promoted the lab-leak lie as established fact. The *Wall Street*

Journal, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*, for example, have whitewashed the active role Ratcliffe has played in pushing the lab-leak narrative. At the same time, the voice of the world-renowned scientists who have researched and published on the origin’s question have effectively been ignored if not silenced.

This campaign has been further promoted by the McCarthyite-like hearings held by Republicans that have positioned the lab-leak theory as having equal weight to the natural spillover which has been the source of every pandemic in modern history. These hearings victimized principled scientists and promoted fringe theories and unproven assertions as facts.

A particular target of the witch-hunters has been EcoHealth Alliance, the scientific group that has pioneered research into bat coronaviruses and the potential threat of pandemics, working in partnership with the WIV in China. The attempts to demonize China, the WIV, and EcoHealth all fall into the larger scheme to shift blame for the COVID pandemic on China and use it as a deliberate lever to promote justification for military conflict against them.

The joint work on coronaviruses, as presented in statements made by Dr. Peter Daszak (former president of EcoHealth Alliance) and Dr. Shi Zhengli (Director of the Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases at the Wuhan Institute of Virology), confirms that both scientists have spent more than a decade seeking to identify potential viral threats to public health and advocating countermeasures to prevent pandemics, not promote them. Now Dr. Daszak has been fired, EcoHealth Alliance has been effectively blacklisted, and China is being targeted by the US military in a conflict that could escalate to nuclear war.

While the American political establishment attempts to demonize China by promoting the lab leak, it is allowing the highly dangerous H5N1 bird flu to continue infecting animals and humans raising the specter of another and potentially much deadlier pandemic. Even the right-wing former director of the National Institutes of Health who has promoted the lab-leak lies, Robert Redfield, has admitted that a bird flu pandemic is highly likely.



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